

Adoption Rights Alliance

REGAINING IDENTITIES, HISTORIES AND RIGHTS FOR ADOPTED PEOPLE

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Tracing Handbook For US Adoptions ("Banished Babies")

Part One:
Obtaining your
Birth Certificate

Introduction

The export of over 2,000 children born to unmarried Irish mothers to the US has been made public since the publication of Mike Milotte's book "Banished Babies" in 1997. Despite this, the Irish State has not provided an information and tracing service to those now adult adopted people who were the subject of this practice. Therefore we are providing the information below, which we hope will assist you in your trace.

You may be surprised to hear that adopted people's human rights are being breached by both church and state in Ireland today. Unlike any other members of Irish society, adopted people have to endure an unjustifiably arduous ordeal just to get their birth certificates. Incredibly, they are denied access to their files and are even excluded from the Freedom of Information Act.

Following on from the 2003 Adoption Legislation Consultation, the Adoption Bill 2009 is making its way through the houses of the Oireachtas (Irish government). At the moment, despite the work of the Consultation, post adoption services are not included in the legislation.

In the meantime, adopted people are at the mercy of adoption agencies, many of whom are at best inefficient and at worst dishonest. It is therefore not surprising that many people will choose to trace for themselves, usually with far greater success than many adoption agencies, despite having less information.

We encourage you to read this Tracing Handbook carefully and contact us if you have any questions.

The information we provide is free of charge. However we are all volunteers and do not receive funding of any kind.

If you would like to make a donation to help cover our expenses you can send a cheque to:

Adoption Rights Alliance
The Mill House,
Millview Road,
Malahide,
Co. Dublin

Reunion or Information?

If you are reading this document you may have decided you want to trace your natural mother (and/or natural family) or you might be in the process of deciding whether you want to trace or not. Many people feel they just want information to begin with and then wish to take time to consider any further action. Whatever situation you are in, the decisions are yours to make in your own time.

In a moment, we will be discussing the merits of tracing for yourself as opposed to asking an agency to trace for you. One of the main advantages to tracing for yourself is the fact that in most cases you can get as far as knowing your original identity and your natural mother's identity without having to approach your natural mother or other natural family members. Many adopted people will do their research first and then decide whether they are ready for reunion or not, as it is a safe way of approaching things gradually. Whatever you decide, take your time and make a choice that you are comfortable with.

Support

You are embarking on an exciting journey, one that can be both exciting and stressful and it is unwise to go it alone. We advise that you avail of as much support as possible through family, friends and support groups listed in **Section 3, Next Steps**.

Emotional Preparation

We also advise that you emotionally prepare yourself for your trace as much as possible by reading books such as *The Primal Wound* by Nancy Verrier. Additional reading material can be found in the reading list in the Appendices.

Agency Trace or Own Trace?

As you embark on your trace, you have a choice. Do you want your adoption agency to trace for you, or do you wish to do your own trace? There are pros and cons to each option and we will set some of these out below to help you make your decision.

Agency Trace	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Agency has identifying information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × No control over your trace × Long waiting lists × Agency dictates the pace × Often inappropriate handling of tracing & reunion process × Agency may have shut down × Slow progress using an agency to trace × Not as healthy for others to trace for you × Identifying information and no reunion is not an option

Own Trace	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ You have control over your trace ✓ You control the pace ✓ First contact is when you want it and how you want it ✓ You can take a break if needed without fear of going to the back of a waiting list ✓ Usually quicker than an agency trace ✓ Healthier to do your own trace ✓ Possible to obtain identifying information without reuniting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> × No access to identifying information × Agencies sometimes withholding information

Using Your Adoption Agency To Trace

If you have decided to use your adoption agency to trace, or if you need to contact your adoption agency for any reason, here are some guidelines to help you through the process. These guidelines are relevant to anyone dealing with an agency. We would also encourage you to continue reading this Tracing Handbook, regardless of what choice you have made.

Guidelines for Dealing with Adoption Agencies

- ✓ Always communicate **in writing** using **Registered (Signed For) Post**.
- ✓ **Do not** give the agency a contact number. If you absolutely have to contact the agency by phone (e.g. to arrange an appointment), we advise that you use a private number (this can be done from any Irish landline by placing 141 before the number to be dialled).
- ✓ Remember, you are a client of the agency and you should expect to be treated respectfully.
- ✓ If you are seeking **information only** make this clear **in writing** to your agency, telling the agency **not** to make contact with your natural mother on your behalf.
- ✓ If you are told that you have been placed on a waiting list, ask how long the wait is and ask to be kept regularly informed of your place in the queue.
- ✓ If you feel your agency is treating you unfairly, please visit www.adoptionrightsalliance.com where you can make a complaint against your agency.
- ✓ Keep track of your paperwork in a folder or file and keep a copy of any correspondence sent to the agency.
- ✓ If you wish, copy your correspondence to Adoption Rights Alliance, clearly stating that you have done so at the end of the letter.

PLEASE NOTE YOUR ADOPTION AGENCY MAY HAVE CLOSED.

Check for your agency in the Links section of our website and if you discover your agency has been closed, you should be able to locate the relevant agency/HSE to contact there. If you feel you are being treated unfairly, please visit www.adoptionrightsalliance.com

Tracing For Yourself

If you have decided to trace for yourself, Adoption Rights Alliance's Tracing Handbooks will show you the steps you should take. The method is completely legal and makes use of the Civil Registration system, which is used by genealogists when compiling family trees. It is essential to follow each step very carefully and ask questions if you are unsure of what you are doing.

The first step on the journey is obtaining your birth certificate and this guide will show you how to achieve this.

The Birth Certificate Myth

The Adoption Authority states that natural mothers must first be contacted before it will release a birth certificate to an adopted person. This is completely unnecessary and by using this Tracing Handbook you can obtain your birth certificate without having to contact your natural mother first.

Key Points To Remember

- Read this document thoroughly
- Prepare yourself emotionally for your trace
- Avail of support
- Decide whether you want to trace for yourself or ask your agency to trace for you
- Take your time making decisions

1.1 First Steps

You firstly need to write to the US adoption agency involved in your adoption seeking confirmation **in writing** a) that you were adopted from Ireland to America and b) the name of the Irish adoption agency that arranged your adoption. If you have difficulty in obtaining this information we recommend that you write to the Minister for Foreign Affairs at: Department of Foreign Affairs, Iveagh House, St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, requesting written confirmation and evidence that you were indeed born in and legally adopted from Ireland and that your natural mother signed the adoption papers.

If you have your original name and surname you can file a Freedom of Information request from the US Citizenship and Information Services (CIS). You can do this via their website at <http://uscis.gov/graphics/aboutus/foia/index.html> From here you can obtain certified copies of your Irish passport and visa records, your Irish birth certificate, and any other details pertaining to your immigration from Ireland.

1.2 If You Do Not Know Your Original Name and Surname

If you do not know your original name and surname you should write to your adoption agency seeking non-identifying information which will assist you in your trace.

A Note About Non-Identifying Information

Some adoption agencies have been known to get non-identifying information wrong, more often than not, the natural mother's age so you should allow for this when you are tracing. **If you are unsure of anything, contact Adoption Rights Alliance for further advice.**

If you know what adoption agency dealt with your adoption

Verify the current address of the agency using the list of names and addresses in the Links section of our website www.adoptionrightsalliance.com and contact them asking them for non-identifying information. There is a sample list of questions below to guide you.

If you don't know the agency

Write to the Adoption Authority asking them for the name of the agency. The sample letter below will guide you in what to say.

Sample Letter to the Adoption Authority:

Information and Tracing Unit
Adoption Authority
Shelbourne House
Shelbourne Rd
Dublin 4

To Whom It May Concern:

I would be obliged if you could inform me of the name and address of the adoption agency that dealt with my adoption.

I would also like a copy of my non-identifying details from my file in the Adoption Authority.

My details are as follows:

Name: Joe/Jane Bloggs Date of Birth: 03-01-67
Name of adoptive parents: John and Mary Bloggs
Address at time of placement: 11 Main Street, Dublin.
My current address: 21 Main Street, Cork.

I would appreciate if you could give this matter your attention at your earliest convenience.

Yours faithfully,

Joe/Jane Bloggs

Sample Questions

Below is a sample list of questions to ask your adoption agency. You should amend the list to suit your own needs. If you have already traced (either successfully or unsuccessfully) and see questions you wish you had asked at the time, there's no reason why you shouldn't ask them now.

General:

- What was my original first name?
- What was my original surname?
- Where was I born?
- What time was I born?

Natural Mother:

- What was my natural mother's first name?
- What was my natural mother's marital status at the time of my birth?
- Were my natural mother's parents living at the time of my birth/adoption?
- What age was my natural mother when I was born?
- Where did my natural mother come from?
- What were the occupations of my natural mother's parents?
- What was my natural mother's occupation?
- Were any other members of my natural family aware of my existence?
- Were any members of my natural family supportive to my natural mother?
- Has my natural mother had any contact with the adoption agency since I was born? If so, please supply further details.
- Do you have any knowledge of my natural mother's marital status?
- Did my natural mother leave any messages on file for me?
- What is my natural mother's education level?
- Did my natural mother express her feelings about my adoption?
- Did my natural mother express any feelings about contact in the future?
- Was my natural mother a resident of any other 'institution' offering social care/support either prior to or post my birth?

Natural Father:

- Do you have any details regarding my natural father?
- Was he aware of my existence?
- Was he supportive of my natural mother?
- Has my natural father had any contact with the adoption agency since I was born? If so, please supply further details.
- What details are on file concerning the relationship that resulted in my conception?

Siblings:

- Did my natural mother lose any other children to adoption?
- Was I my natural mother's first child? If not, please supply any details of prior births.
- Did my natural mother have any children subsequent to my adoption?
- How many brothers and sisters did my natural mother have?

Other Natural Family Members:

- Did any other members of my natural family contact the agency at any time?

Birth:

- Was my birth normal or were there complications?
- What was my birth weight?
- Were there any difficulties with the pregnancy?
- Was I carried to full term?
- If not, what precipitated early delivery and at what stage in the pregnancy?

Health:

- Did I present as healthy at birth?
- Please supply me with details concerning my health from the time I was born until I was placed with my adoptive parents.
- Prior to my placement with my adoptive parents did my weight increase at a normal pace?
- Are there any hereditary medical conditions in my natural family?
- What was my natural mother's state of health at the time of my birth?
- Is there any medical information available regarding any other children born (either dead or alive) to my natural mother?
- Was my natural mother a resident of any other 'institution' offering social care/support either prior or post my birth?

Baptism:

- What church was I baptised in?
- Was my natural mother or any other natural relative present at my baptism?
- Who was my sponsor at baptism?

Mother & Baby Home/Nursing Home:

- Were any developmental difficulties noted during my stay at [name of mother and baby home/nursing home]?
- Were any bonding/attachment difficulties noted?
- Was my natural mother with me prior to my placement with my adoptive parents?
- Were visitors allowed in [name of mother and baby home/nursing home]?
- Did I receive any visitors? If so, who were they?
- Is there any anecdotal information regarding my stay in [name of mother and baby home/nursing home]?

General Questions:

- Did my natural mother give informed consent to my adoption?
- Was my natural mother made aware of any other choices apart from adoption?
- Did my natural mother sign a contract or letter requiring/requesting confidentiality or anonymity from [name of agency]? If so, I would be obliged if you could furnish me with a copy of the documentation.
- What support did my natural mother receive after my adoption?
- Did you give my adoptive parents any information about my natural family, medical or otherwise?

IMPORTANT! COMMUNICATE IN WRITING AND USE REGISTERED POST

It is advisable to use **Registered Post** in all correspondence with the Adoption Authority and your adoption agency. We advise that you **do not provide a contact phone number** as you may be contacted at an inappropriate time. We recommend that you obtain any information **in writing** and that all information provided by an agency should be checked thoroughly.

Key Points To Remember

- If you know your agency, write and ask for non-identifying information
- If you don't know your agency, write to the Adoption Authority
- Communicate only in writing and via Registered Post

If you find that your adoption was illegal, please see our Tracing Handbook for Illegal Adoptions and contact us at tracing@adoptionrightsalliance.com

2. Obtaining Your Birth Certificate

If you have been unable to locate your birth certificate and if you have been unable to ascertain your original surname, you may need to visit the General Registrar's Office in Dublin to do some research. We suggest that you read this document thoroughly before making any plans to travel so that you maximise your time in Ireland. If you cannot travel, you can request help from volunteers who will sometimes offer to do the leg-work in Ireland however, Adoption Rights Alliance accepts no responsibility for arrangements made between you and the volunteer. If you absolutely need assistance from a volunteer you should always pay them for the expenses they have occurred. Expenses can be anywhere from \$50-\$100 a day depending on the distance the volunteer has to travel. You should also be wary of people asking for excessive payments and we recommend that you avoid using private investigators as they are not trained in the area of adoption and may not exercise the discretion needed in adoption traces.

2.1 Visiting The General Registrar's Office

To obtain your birth certificate, you need to visit the Research Room in the General Registrar's Office. The Research Room is located at 3rd Floor, Block 7, Irish Life Centre, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1, though as you will see from the map below, it is often easier to access via The Irish Life Mall on Talbot Street. Take the elevator to the 3rd floor and turn right.



Checklist BEFORE Visiting the Research Room:

- ✓ Read this Tracing Handbook thoroughly
- ✓ Bring a copy of this Tracing Handbook with you to the Research Room
- ✓ Bring pens, a notepad and ruler (you might find the ruler useful when checking the books)

General Information/Tips For Your Visit To The Research Room

- ✓ Opening hours are Monday to Friday from 9.30am – 4.30pm (open during lunch).
- ✓ Bring sufficient money to cover you for the day.
- ✓ When you pay for a General Search, you can request as many books as you wish for the same fee for that day. However, you will still have to pay for photocopies of certificates individually.
- ✓ When you pay for a Five Year Search, you will receive books for five **consecutive** years (e.g. 1973 – 1977), though when searching for your birth certificate you will only need the book for your year of birth (unless you were born late in the year, in which case see the section below about searching the registers).
- ✓ Only five photocopies of certificates per person per day are allowed, though they will post out any surplus requests to you if you wish.
- ✓ Bring a friend or relative if they are available to help look through the registers and avail of double the amount of photocopies.
- ✓ Do not hesitate to ask Research Room staff for help.

Please note: Fees have increased:

General Search: €20

Five Year Search: €2

Photocopies: €4

Full Certificates: €8 with references, €10 without

2.2 Searching The Register Of Live Births

As you will only have your non-identifying information and your date of birth to guide you, it is absolutely essential that you search through the registers with great care. We have compiled a list of instructions and helpful hints below, which you should read thoroughly.

IMPORTANT! PLEASE READ BEFORE SEARCHING THE REGISTERS!

- **Take your time** looking through the books
- Search **all** of the books, even if you think you have found your entry after ten minutes
- Make sure you **check all four quarters** for registrations before 1966 (see below)
- Even if you have somehow obtained your original name prior to visiting the Research Room, make sure you check the books thoroughly, as it is impossible to guarantee that the information is correct
- You will be asked to fill out a form in the Research Room requesting the books, which are now available for you to retrieve from the shelves yourself.
- The father's name was rarely entered on birth certificates of this kind; so do not be disheartened if you see "father unknown" or a blank field where the father's name should be. This was very common at the time and should not be treated as a negative indication of the possible outcome of a reunion with your natural mother or father.
- If you were born late in the year (November or December), you should request the book for the year after your birth as well, because it was common for these births to be registered at the beginning of the following year.
- Check the back of the books for **hand written late registrations**.
- Please note, some birth/death/marriage certificates will have different first names on them – e.g. your natural mother might be known as Bridget, but on her birth certificate the name might be Mary Bridget. So, it is important to be watchful for this phenomenon as it can lead a lot of people astray.

2.2.1 Format of the Registers

The format of the registers changed in January 1966 so we shall explain both formats.

Pre January 1966:

Births prior to January 1966 were registered every three months; the books are separated into four quarters, March, June, September and December with no dates of birth included in the books. **Please ensure you check all four quarters.**

Format of Pre 1966 Registers:

Surname	Child's Name*	Mother's Maiden Name	Area of Reg.	Vol	Page
Murphy	Mary	Jones	Dublin S	2	421
Murphy	John	Murphy	Delvin	3	211
Murphy	Sheila	McKenna	Dublin N	4	433

**Note, the adopted person's name may have been changed by the adoptive parents.*

What to Look For

- Look for entries where the surname (which is the child's surname) and mother's maiden name are the same (see the example above in **red**).
- Take note of all the entries where this occurs, only selecting male or female entries as appropriate. Please ensure that you write down the volume and page numbers on your notepad, as you will need

these when ordering the photocopies.

Post January 1966:

Births from January 1966 are sorted alphabetically, and not separated into quarters, but dates of birth are included in the registers.

Format of Post 1966 Registers:

Surname	Child's Name*	Mother's Maiden Name	Area of Reg.	Date of Birth	Vol	Page	Qtr
Murphy	Mary	Jones	Dublin S	22-05-1973	2	421	2
Murphy	John	Murphy	Delvin	15-02-1973	3	211	1
Murphy	Sheila	McKenna	Dublin N	22-03-1973	4	433	1

**Note, the adopted person's name may have been changed by the adoptive parents.*

Please Note: There will be three or four books for your year of birth, registered alphabetically and you should search **all** of the books for that year.

What to Look For

- As with pre 1966 births, you can check for instances where the mother's maiden name and the child's surname are the same (see the example above in **red**).
- If you prefer, as the date of birth is visible in post 1966 births, you can check for your date of birth and then check to see if the child's surname and mother's maiden name are the same.
- Take note of all the entries where this occurs, eliminating male or female entries depending on your gender. Please ensure that you write down the volume and page numbers, as well as the quarter as you will need this information to order photocopies.

2.3 Process of Elimination

Once you have checked **all** of the books for your year of birth you should have a number of possibilities to work from and you now need to engage in a process of elimination. There is a list of instructions and helpful hints below that should help you narrow all the possibilities down to one birth certificate.

How to Eliminate Possibilities

- If you are sure of the name given to you by your natural mother, check through your list for entries with that name.
- If you know where you were born (be careful of wrongly assuming you were born in Dublin), you can eliminate possibilities using this information. There are maps and lists of areas of registration available in the Research Room to help you with this.
- If you have found only one entry, it is possible that it is your birth certificate; however we would urge you to be extra careful and ensure that all of the details match up with your non-identifying information.

2.4 Requesting Photocopies

At this point you should have narrowed down the possibilities significantly. You should request photocopies of the remaining entries on your list. To do this you must fill in a photocopy request form and hand it in to a staff member at the Research Room.

Hopefully at this stage, only one photocopy will match your non-identifying details and date of birth. If so, you have found your birth certificate. If more than one photocopy matches your details, you will need

to do further research to narrow things down. You can learn how to do this in **Part 2: Next Steps in Tracing**.

Please Note: Don't throw away extra photocopies and notes, as they might be useful to someone else. If you do not wish to store them yourself, post to Adoption Rights Alliance at The Mill House, Millview Road, Malahide, Co. Dublin, with a note saying they are extra photocopies you did not need.

Key Points to Remember

- Read this document thoroughly
- Take your time checking the books
- Make sure to check **all** books for your year of birth
- When you obtain your birth certificate, take a step back and consider your next steps

3. Next Steps

Congratulations! You should now have your birth certificate or you might still have a couple of possible certificates and you are almost there. This is a fantastic achievement and you should be proud of what you have done.

Obtaining your birth certificate is just one step of the journey and you should proceed with caution and use the information responsibly. The next steps you should take are outlined in **Part 2: Next Steps in Tracing**. In the meantime please read the following important guidelines:

Please Read Before Proceeding

- Please act responsibly and **do not proceed** without reading **Part 2: Next Steps in Tracing**.
- If you have access to the internet and if you haven't done so already, join ASNI, our sister group's online support group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/irishadoptionsupport>
- Please feel free to email us at tracing@adoptionrightsalliance.com for advice.

4. National Adoption Contact Preference Register

In addition to your trace it's also worth registering with the National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR). Visit this link for further details: <http://www.aai.gov.ie/index.php/information-a-tracing/contact-preference-register.html> **Please Note:** Registering with the NACPR does not mean that the Adoption Authority will initiate a trace on your behalf.

Suggested Reading List

Background to Irish Adoption



Banished Babies,
by Mike Millotte

Export of over 2000 Irish children to the United States in the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's.



Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment
by James M. Smith

Excellent book documenting church/state collusion in incarcerating women in Magdalene Laundries, many of whom lost children to adoption.



Do Penance or Perish: Magdalen Asylums in Ireland,
by Frances Finnegan

The book focuses on the Magdalen Homes run by the Good Shepherd nuns in Ireland.



Suffer the Little Children: The inside Story of Ireland's Industrial Schools,
by Mary Raftery and Eoin O'Sullivan

A comprehensive look at the entire state/church child care system in Ireland.



The Light in the Window,
by June Goulding

The author worked as a midwife in the Bessboro', Cork mother-baby home attached to the Sacred Heart Adoption Agency.



A Woman To Blame – The Kerry Babies Case
by Nell McCafferty

Though not directly adoption related, this book provides an excellent window into the social circumstances and pressure faced by natural mothers.

The Adoption Experience



Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child,
by Nancy Verrier



Lost and Found: The Adoption Experience,
by Betty Jean Lifton



Twice Born: Memoirs of an Adopted Daughter,
by Betty Jean Lifton



Journey of the Adopted Self: A quest for Wholeness,
by Betty Jean Lifton



The Adoption Reunion Survival Guide,
by Julie Jarrell Bailey & Lynn N Giddens



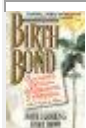
The Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution is Transforming America,
by Adam Pertman



Blue-eyed Son: The Story of an Adoption,
by Nicky Campbell



Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew,
by Sherrie Eldridge



Birth Bond: Between Birthparents and Adoptees,
by Judith Gediman & Linda Brown



Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race Before Roe Versus Wade,
by Ricki Solinger