I grew up with the knowledge that my mom's side of the family was really involved in the development of my hometown of Omaha, Nebraska.

From banking, to civic life, to education, there are traces of the Coad, Caldwell, and Creighton families everywhere.

But how did we come to settle in the middle of America? Using my grandfather's genealogy work, I narrowed my search to my great-great-great-grandfather, John Francis Coad Sr, as a good place to begin my research.

His 1910 obituary in the Omaha World-Herald offered plenty of valuable information, including the fact that he had arrived from Ireland in 1850 with his parents, Patrick and Anna Kelly Coad, and settled in Albany, New York.

However, there was no mention of their port of arrival. One article about John's time in the cattle industry, found in the 1938 volume of "Nebraska History," suggested that Boston was a likely port of entry, so that is where I began.

I unsuccessfully searched through about 200 pages of passenger records for the year 1850 before I realized there had to be a better way to search for him.

Databases such as RootsWeb and FamilySearch.org had proven to be helpful in the past for researching other branches of my family tree, but rarely, if ever, had I gotten hits for the last name Coad.

My grandfather's research suggested that the family name may have been changed upon arrival, especially since Patrick was illiterate, so I began to look for variants, particularly Codd.

I looked up the origin of the surname Codd in Ireland, and it is very common in County Wexford, where we're from, and rare outside of it, so this seemed to be a likely answer!

Once I began to search for "Patrick Codd," I really started to make headway. Eventually, I stumbled across a passenger record in Baltimore, Maryland for "P. Codd" that matched country of origin, age, occupation, and year of arrival.

But when I looked at the rest of the passenger list, I could not find any other members of his family, and from John's obituary and articles about him, I had been led to believe that the whole family emigrated together.

Then I found that John F. Coad had listed his year of emigration as 1856 in the 1900 Census. With this information, I can infer that it is possible that Patrick may have immigrated to the U.S. first, with his family following six years later.

I still have a lot of work to do to verify these documents and dig deeper into their immigration experience, but I'm very happy with the progress I've made. From these humble beginnings, my ancestors started the cattle industry in western Nebraska, helped found a major Jesuit university, and served their state as legislators and attorney generals. More importantly, it led to these incredible people in my life.

This legacy is one that I am proud to document for the generations to come.