

The Story Behind Upperchurch Connections

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June 9, 2006

We arrived in Ireland, in the summer of 1997, knowing that Edmond McGrath had come from Upperchurch, Co. Tipperary around the early 1850s and that was about it. On a rainy day we visited Upperchurch, wandered through the graveyard where there was a sea of Ryan headstones and took a few pictures. During the second week of our trip, while wandering through the Ennis Bookshop on Church Street, an oversized magazine with a pen and ink drawing on its white cover caught my attention. The publication was the journal *The Other Clare*, published annually by the Ennis based Shannon Archaeological and Historical Society. An article named "I slandmagrath and the Macraith Family" by Paddy Connors caught my eye.

A reference at the end of the one page article on the history of the Macraith family led to the Local History Center there in Ennis, and to the Pedigree of the Macraith Family. The librarian, Maureen Comber, offered to make copies later on one of the better machines and send them along to us. After thanking her for her kindness we left to begin our search for I slandmagrath itself.

The article had described the approximate location of I slandmagrath but it didn't show up on the regular tourist maps. We purchased one of the Ordnance Survey Discovery Series Maps at that same Ennis Bookshop and figured out exactly where I slandmagrath was located and it turned out to be relatively close by. Luck was with us again in this same bookshop when after picking up the map I was drawn to some shelves at the back of the store. A book called *Irish Immigrants* drew my attention and I instinctively checked the index for the surname McGrath. There I found an entry for my gg-grandmother Mary McGrath and her sons Michael and John who arrived in New York City with their mother on November 7, 1850 on board the *British Queen*.

As our last day in Ireland was winding to a close we set out in search of I slandmagrath driving down roads that probably had not seen a tourist in years. About three miles southwest of Clare Castle we saw an elongated mound rising about 100 feet in

height that fit the description of Islandmagrath. Making a lucky guess we found a "road" through a field that led us up to the top of Islandmagrath. After taking a couple pictures from the top of Islandmagrath the rain was starting again so we headed back toward Ennis as our time in Ireland was rapidly coming to an end.

After we were back in the U.S. the copies of the microfilmed manuscripts arrived from Maureen Comber at the Ennis Local Study Center. Not only had she copied the original manuscript with the Macraith Pedigree she had also copied a second related manuscript she had found. The second set of copies turned out to contain an extremely detailed genealogy of Miler Magrath and his many descendants. Miler was descended from the Macraiths of Islandmagrath by way of the Magraths of Termon Magrath in Co. Donegal – or so the legend goes. After a bit more research it appears that Edmond McGrath of Upperchurch is probably descended from Miler Magrath. and therefore from the Macraiths of Islandmagrath.

Miler was the Archbishop of Cashel and Emyl from 1570 until 1613 and his descendants remained in the area around Cashel, Co. Tipperary in the years following his death in 1622. At the end of the Rebellion of 1641 the English confiscated Irish lands and most of the Magrath family was transplanted to Co. Clare. Edmond Magrath, grandson of Miler Magrath, and his large family settled in the parish of Tulla east of Ennis. A portion of Edmond's family appears to have remained behind in the parish of Clonoulty, Co. Tipperary. Edmond McGrath of Upperchurch appears to have been descended from this branch of the family.

Over the years some of the descendants of the part of the family that was transplanted to Co. Clare settled in Ennis. In 1846 and 1856 a Robert M'Grath was listed as a bookseller with a shop on Church Street. Now Church Street is only 3 blocks long so Robert's shop and the present Ennis Bookshop were at most only a couple of blocks apart.

It's ironic that a casual visit to a bookshop on a rainy day would begin a search whose trail led back to that very same street. And along the way we found the ancestors of Edmond McGrath and Mary Ryan.

The Origins of the McGrath Family began on that rainy day in Ennis in Co. Clare. I was fortunate to track down the Macraith Pedigrees while I was in Ennis even though it would be over six months before I would really understand what I had found. Back in Austin

I discovered that the University of Texas Library had a huge collection of Irish journals and reference texts such as the Annals of the Four Masters. So I began a journey back to the beginning of the Macraith family with the aid of a generous library that would loan out books from the 1850s that hadn't seen the light of day in the past 50 years. The history of the family is not continuous since no one has written their story. Instead, their story weaves itself through the histories of the better-documented families and that is where the trail leads.

After the Irish lost the Battle of the Boyne in 1689 the Penal Era settled over Ireland. Named for a succession of laws passed in England and inflicted upon the Catholics of Ireland they systematically took away the rights of the Catholics and left them defenseless before the courts of their day. In effect they were banned from all those activities that would leave a paper trail. The intention of the English was to reduce the Irish to an illiterate nation that owned no land and had even forgotten who their ancestors were. It was against the law to practice the Catholic religion and priests became hunted criminals, saying Mass in the fields around Ireland with "Mass rocks" serving as altars. Needless to say there were few if any church records compiled during this period that lasted until the Emancipation Acts in 1828. Some churches did start keeping records in the latter part of the 18th century but they were the exception.

My initial research began on the backside of the Penal Era, although I didn't know that when I started. When I was finally able to decipher the pedigrees that I had obtained from the Local Studies Center in Ennis I found that several families were represented there. The most prominent was that of Miler Magrath and I was able to trace his family through the Rebellion of 1641 and the following Transplantation to Connaught. There was an Edmond Magrath who owned land in Upperchurch parish, Co. Tipperary in the 1650's. Peering forward, over the darkness of the Penal times, to the 1840s, you find my ancestor Edmond Magrath of Upperchurch. The location, similar spelling of the surname and the identical given names causes one to suspect a relationship there. A survey of McGraths in the Upperchurch and Moyliff cemeteries by the Tipperary Family History Center at Nenagh turned up some possible connections but nothing that was definite. *The Origins of the McGrath Family*. was printed up in the summer of 1999 just in time for the 50th McGraw

Reunion at Highland Forest in Fabius, NY – close to where my ancestors had settled some 150 years before.

In June of 2000 we made a second trip to Ireland and it turned out to be much more productive than our first. In Upperchurch we had finally made contact with Con Ryan of Glown (Gleninchaveigh) – a fifth cousin once removed. We received a very warm reception and got to share a drink with the present owners of my gg-grandmother's ancestral cottage. A quick visit with the local parish priest, the most helpful Fr. Donal Cunningham, allowed me to photograph copies of all the McGrath baptismal and marriage records in the Upperchurch RC parish. Everywhere we went I bought books on the local history and finally had to buy an extra suitcase to carry them all home in. My intention was to return home and start filling in the gaps in the *Origins of the McGrath Family*. There were several concentrations of McGrath families found in Co. Tipperary, Co. Waterford and Co. Clare and I wanted to explore the connections between them. But that was before I ran across Pat Bird.

In July 2000 I was at the SEMI CON trade show in San Francisco and was surfing the Internet late one night from my hotel room. I happened upon a post on one of the genealogy bulletin boards concerning a Ryan family in Fabius, NY that had come from Gleninchaveigh – the same townland that my Ryan ancestors had been associated with back in Upperchurch. Pat led me to Dick Barr and his extensive transcriptions of Central New York church records and his very extensive genealogy of the Phillip Ryan and Margaret Ryan family from Gleninchaveigh who had settled in Fabius, NY in 1854-5. Here were two Ryan families, from the same small townland in Ireland, both settling in Fabius, NY. Although my Ryans haven't been connected to Pat's Ryans we still believe there is a connection back there in Ireland – back in the penal years – that remains to be discovered. About this same time I discovered the wonderful web site of the late Daniel Weiskotten for the Cazenovia area and all the extensive data that it contained. Anyone who has tried to do genealogy research in Ireland knows how hard it is because of the destruction of all the census records prior to 1901 due to the fire in the Four Courts building during the Irish civil war in 1921. I still wanted to fill in the gaps in the "Origins" but this Central New York data just kept piling up on the table. The final straw was an e-mail I received around Christmas 2000 from a cousin that

alerted me to the availability of the Federal census records on CD. That did it – I plunged into the search on this side of the ocean – Ireland would have to wait.

Out of the “Origins” book, the Truxton section began to grow. The church records from Dick Barr provided the essential connections between the families in the form of baptismal sponsors and marriage witnesses. The census records showed which families were neighbors and the town maps of the 1870s and the land records provided the information on the movement of the families. As I put together the history of my family the list of friends and neighbors began to grow and I would keep track of the information on all of them as I went along. It took longer, but I thought it would come in handy later on – and it always did. This section got too big to be an update and became *The McGrath Family of Central New York*. The first half of the book is centered on my family and the latter half is a record of all the information that I was able to find on all the friends and relatives. Most of the latter half is an orderly compilation of information from many sources put together in a format that I found to be more useful – a family tree structure. A database of recent family members had been compiled by my brother in law, Tom Maloney, and I recast that into a family tree structure and added it to the rest of my findings. After going through three drafts between Dec 2001 and Mar 2002 *The McGrath Family of Central New York* grew from about 100 pages to a little less than 300. It was finished.

Now what to do? Hard copies would cost about \$25 a piece after taking into account printing and shipping. I decided to go with electronic copies, in a PDF format, that greatly reduced the size of the files and made the formatting quirks of MS Word invisible to the reader. However, some e-mail systems still could not handle the size of the files so I settled on a simple web site where both documents would be available for anyone to read or download if they wanted. That was up and running on the morning of March 13, 2002.

I was tired of editing and publishing and wanted to get back to searching again. In my searches I had uncovered many Ryan families that had all settled in an area of Central New York where the counties of Onondaga, Cortland and Madison come together. Suspecting connections between these families but not being able to close the gaps, I wrote up what I had found and posted it to several genealogy bulletin boards and circulated it on a couple mailing lists. In response to this I received an e-mail from Barb Ryan of Cortland, NY. She also had Ryans that had come from Upperchurch and she had information on the related

Dwyer and Burke families also from Upperchurch. As I added more information to the new information that Barb had brought to my attention the Upperchurch connections began to grow and what had been a Ryan focus was broadened to cover the entire Upperchurch area of Co. Tipperary. Over the next couple years the Upperchurch connections continued to grow and now stand at over two dozen.

It had happened again. What was formerly just a section of a previous book was growing into a book of its own. While the connections back to Upperchurch kept growing so did the links among the families. What has resulted from this are a series of Family Reports. The family reports are based on families that were originally written up in *The McGrath Family of Truxton, New York* and some new families. Usually the coverage in that book was limited to 1-3 pages. When more information became available and connections were established the report would grow to documents that were 10-30 pages in length.

The development of the Family Reports normally proceeded through three stages. In the first stage they were merely depositories for organizing and the reformatting of information. In the second stage family stories and connections to other families would be added as they become available. In the third stage the families would usually be traced back to their countries of origin and down to present day descendants. In the more fortunate cases family photographs and more family stories might be found and added to the reports.

These reports were piling up and needed an outlet. I would search out descendants and incorporate their information into these reports but I could only focus on a few at one time. They needed more exposure - they needed a web site. Two documents were pulled together to help organize that effort: "First Arrivals" and "The Upperchurch Families." The former document lists the individuals in the order in which they arrived in the tri-county area. The latter document is organized by families, with more detail on their origins, children and the years of their birth along with some information on where they had settled. Still more detailed information is provided in the individual Family Reports that go into much more detail

In December 2005 I started a mailing list for folks with an interest in the Upperchurch area. The list is hosted by Rootsweb under the name of IRL-Kilnamanagh. This provides a means for everyone interested in the Upperchurch area to share information and communicate with others who have a similar interest. However, this exchange is limited to

text messages while the attachment of files are not allowed due concerns over the propagation of viruses and other cyber-nasties.

Hence the "Upppechurch Connections" web site was created and launched on _____ ..