

CORRESPONDENCE

In July of this year our secretary received the following interesting letter from Mr. Richard McCaffrey of New Jersey, U.S.A.

657 Pierre Avenue,
Mantua,
New Jersey 08051 USA

July 6, 1991

Dear Mrs. Heron,

During the past four years, since a vacation to Fermanagh in 1987, I have been researching the McCaffreys of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, one of whom was my great grandfather, Henry. Family stories say he came "from somewhere near Armagh." After lengthy research, I learned he had two prominent younger brothers, Hugh and John, whose births are recorded in Gilford, Tullylish parish, Co. Down. The parents were Hugh and Ann (Nancy) McComiskey - McCaffrey. Henry's birth was not found, as it predates existing Banbridge records. However, Henry's marriage sponsors in Philadelphia and baptismal sponsors were named "Herron," a known mill name in Banbridge of the period.

Hugh and John became quite prominent Irish-Americans, being officers of the Irish National League, the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, members of the City Council, members of the committee that placed the statue of John Barry outside Independence Hall and owners of the McCaffrey File Company. They were among the dozen most well-known of the Irish immigrants of the period. The family split when some of them became active in the secret society, "Clan na 'Gael."

Hugh's son, Edward, toured the Down area during a trip in 1910 and left a diary in which he refers to visits to relatives in Loughbrickland, Newry and Poyntzpass, as well as time spent in Belfast. It appears that family still existed in Down as late as the start of the First War.

I would be very interested in learning whether your society has any records on file of a Henry, birth about 1830, or Arthur, 1833. It would appear that there was some movement about the area and that the family was in Down at least as early as 1800. I have been a member of the Banbridge Society for about two years and have found about six of the younger siblings, but Henry still remains to be found.

We had last week a reunion of 125 McCaffreys descended from Henry, Hugh and John — the first reuniting since the end of the last century when they all worked at the McCaffrey File Company, defunct since 1929.

Any help or advice you might provide would be greatly appreciated. I plan a trip to Down in May, 1992, and would like to get an idea of the local churches that might hold a record of the McCaffreys.

Respectfully yours,

RICHARD H. McCAFFREY

At our request Mr. McCaffrey forwarded a photocopy of the diary referred to, extracts from which we reproduce.

The following are extracts from the diary of Edward V. McCaffrey, which he kept during his trip to this area in 1911.

Dublin — Newry — Loughbrickland

Friday, May 12th :

Weather fine. Arose 8 a.m. Took a walk in morning, then I had a dandy turkish bath. Sent post to Father and views to mother, May, Gertrude, Mr. Halligan and Miss O'Neill. Left Dublin p.m. on Gt. Northern Railway arriving in Newry at 5.20 p.m. Stopping at Victoria Hotel. Evening, went to moving picture show. Took a dandy? pain. Went back to Hotel and sent for Doctor. He came and wanted to charge ½ sovereign but when I complained he said 8s - 6d. Did not get prescription filled. Retired at 11 p.m. Stopped to see Aunt Alice and gave her £5.

Newry — Drumsallagh

May 13th Saturday:

Weather fine. Arose 7.30 a.m. Breakfast 8 a.m. Took a jaunting car ride to Loughbrickland and Drumsallagh. Gosh, this was a very nice drive of 8 miles. Sent letter to Mary, Postals to mother, Miss O'Neill, Joe, also Mary Johnson. Back to Newry again 5 p.m. Retired 11 p.m.

May 14th Sunday:

Weather miserable. Went to 8 o'clock Mass at Cathedral in downpour of rain. Took a long jaunting car ride of 13 miles in rain to see Mrs. Johnson in Dorsey, Cullyhanna. Back to Newry at 5.15. Left Newry at 6.48 p.m. for Poyntzpass, arrived there.

Drumsallagh and Banbridge

May 15th Monday:

Weather fine. Had a good cart ride to Banbridge. Left on 2.30 p.m. train to Belfast. Arrived in Belfast o.k. and am stopping in The Grand Central Hotel. Had a cart ride on Barney Conlon's cart from Drumsallagh to Banbridge where I got train. On way to Ban' got a letter from Mary at Loughbrickland P.O. In the evening went to McCaffreys. They are now living at 9, Glandare Gardens, Antrim Road. Spent a very pleasant evening Mr. and Mrs. Robbins want me to come and stay with them the rest of my visit. Met whole family except Jennie. Retired at 11.15 p.m.

From May 15th Edward McCaffrey remained in Belfast until May 18th when he set off for London. He returned to Belfast on June 11th, 1911 and arrived back in Drumsallagh on June 12th.

Belfast

June 12th Monday:

Arose 9 a.m. Bought my? for 2nd class passage on steamer "Mauretania," leaving Liverpool, Saturday June 24th. Same cost £12-10s. Bought piece of chewing tobacco for 1s-1d. Answered Mary's letter of May 15th ... Bought souvenir spoon of Ireland 12s ... Left Belfast 4.45 p.m. arrived Banbridge 5.50 p.m. Took jaunting car to Drumsallagh to Barney Conlon's. Retired 10.30 p.m.

Drumsallagh

June 13th Tuesday:

Weather fine. Arose 8.30 a.m. Walt and I took a walk to Poyntzpass 1½ Irish miles from here. In the afternoon lounged around and did nothing, retired 10.30 p.m.

Drumsallagh

June 14th :

Weather fine. ... Walt and I took a fair walk in the morning and slept in the afternoon. We spent the evening at Andersons and retired at 10.30 p.m. In the afternoon a butcher came and killed Conlon's cow.

Drumsallagh

June 15 Thursday :

Arose 6.30 a.m. Walked to Loughbrickland to 8.30 Mass as this is a holiday (Corpus Christi). We got a lift back in Anderson's trap. Sent card to Father, Mother, Mary...
... Barney Conlon came home from Newry with a beautiful load on.

Drumsallagh

June 16th

Rain slightly all day. Arose 8.30 a.m. No letters. Walt got North Am. of June 6th.

Drumsallagh and Belfast

June 17th Saturday:

Barney Conlon took us in a cart to Banbridge where I took the 2.52 train to Belfast... In the evening I went to the Hippodrome and saw a fairly good vaudeville show... met a man from San Diego Cal. Retired 12.30 a.m.

Edward McCaffrey left Belfast on June 19th enroute to Liverpool and his return to U.S.A.
While in this area letters were addressed to him:—

E. V. McCaffrey
C/O Jas Devlin
Drumsallagh
Loughbrickland
Co. Down
Ireland.



Barney Conlon's house, Drumsallagh, to-day.



James Devlin's, Drumsallagh.

The following extracts are taken from a letter from another exile. Mr. Jimmie Smith a native of Lissummon, now living in Blackburn.

10, Emerald Street,
Brownhill
Blackburn,
Lancs.

12th January, 1991

Dear Mrs. Heron,

Thanks for sending me Number IV of "Before I Forget..." which I received today and which is very interesting...

I was born in 1923 in the townland of Lissummon, Jerrettspass, and worked on several farms in the area as a young man. During the war years I worked for Finches of Cullentrough, near Lissummon....

...On a brief holiday last summer my wife remarked on how prosperous everyone seemed. The new and refurbished houses and bungalows with not a thatched, whitewashed cottage in sight...

...What a change in the countryside! Field after field of luscious, dark green nitrogenous grass with large herds of contented looking cows enjoying themselves — but not a person to be seen (I wonder do the farmers have an mid-day 'siesta' now-a-days?) Not so many years ago the same fields would have been full of farmers and their families hay making etc. We saw just one field of potatoes near Acton and one field of corn in Lissummon.

When I was a boy it was nearly all 'mixed-farming'. A lea field was ploughed and sown in oats. The next year it was planted in potatoes and the third year it was sown in oats with grass seed sown at the same time — the oats acting as a nursery crop. During the fourth year it would yield a crop of 'seed' hay. It would then be left in grazing for at least 7 years before being ploughed again.

In those days corn was cut by horse drawn mowing machines and had to be lifted and tied by hand — including the thistles, which was very severe on the skin! I only knew one man in Lissummon who was still using a scythe to cut his crops. It was a more skilled job "lifting" corn after a scythe than after a mowing machine...

...I wonder whether there are any fairs left in the North of Ireland, I'm told there may still be a few in the West. Poyntzpass fair used to take place on the first Saturday of each month on the main street. It was a day when boys were in great demand from farmers to act as "stop-gaps" while they drove their livestock to the fair. It was the "wee fella's" job to run in front and stand at crossroads and gaps and guide the animals towards Poyntzpass. Occasionally there were 2 gaps opposite each other and then the cattle got into a field. It was the boy's job to go in and drive them out again. Looking back it was amusing to hear the farmers and dealers haggling over the price and especially when the dealer requested the farmer to 'howl' out his hand and would hit it a huge smack.

Fair day was about the only time I received an ice-cream — a 4d slider from Tommy Price. If the farmer sold his animals I usually got a shilling (5p); if he didn't sell them I got nothing and had the extra bother of walking the cattle home again...

...It would be a good idea to re-enact a fair sometime during the summer months — it would be a big tourist attraction.

Yours sincerely,

JIMMIE SMITH