

# Genealogy Basics – Irish Records, Searching Collateral Family Members

By Joe Petrie

## INTRODUCTION:

Sometimes, I find that gathering public information for an individual is challenging. For my wife's Irish families (Connolly from Galway, O'Brien from Cork, and McGrath from Waterford), getting beyond oral history was especially challenging. There is a paucity of Irish public information resources. In some cases, oral history is all we have.

Professional genealogy researchers usually start with oral history. We try to validate it using public records. Members of the Association of Professional Genealogy try to find 2 validating records.

I like to use Census records (ten year snapshots) as a starting point to validate oral information. Sometimes, genealogy researchers can't get to the subject person. Nominal census records do not exist or the records only identify the head of household.

For Ireland, for example, 19<sup>th</sup> Century Census records were almost totally destroyed. (There are some fragments.) There are two 20<sup>th</sup> Century nominal censuses (1901 and 1911). As a result, validation of oral history in Ireland is much more difficult. There are on-line sources like FamilySearch, Ancestry, Ancestry Library, IrishGenealogy, AskAboutIreland and National Library of Ireland databases.

I volunteer to do free 2 hour individual consultations at two sites, Often, when I am "stuck", I ask whether other family members immigrated to the United States. For collateral family members, I search for their census records. In addition, I search passenger records in Ancestry Library, Castle Garden and Ellis Ireland. Also, I search for military and naturalization records in Ancestry Library and marriage records in Ancestry Library and FamilySearch. Finally, I search for vitals in AmericanAncestors.

## BACKGROUND:

This article is about gathering information for my wife's McGrath family. In this case, I started gathering information from three living children of John Joseph McGrath of Waterford County, Boston MA and Malden MA. Their oral history helped me to gather information on Ellen's mother (Helena "Lena" O'Brien Connolly). John Joseph McGrath, who emigrated to Boston at age 20 in 1902, was Lena's uncle.

My wife Ellen was married with four sons when she really started to learn about her O'Brien and McGrath families. It was ironic that her spouse had genealogy as a hobby but she did not know enough about her mother's family to help research it. Ellen knew the basics: birth, marriage, and death. She really knew nothing more.

Here's what she knew:

- Ellen's mother Helena "Lena" O'Brien was age 27 when she married John Connolly in 1938 in Boston.
- Lena was born in Ireland in 1911.
- Lena died in Boston in 1944.
- Lena died nearly six years after the marriage.
- Lena was survived by her husband and 3 children under 5. Ellen was the youngest, nearly 2. Her sister Barbara was nearly 5 and her brother Robert was nearly 3.
- Lena buried in New Cavalry Cemetery in Boston.

Ellen's immersion into her families McGrath and O'Brien started when she was in her thirties. McGrath was first.

One day in the late 1960s, Ellen met her cousin Father Joe. Ellen was working in a garden next to our house and dressed for gardening, she saw a priest walking up our driveway. Her surprise was that he was seeking her – a long lost cousin. He was John Joseph (Father Joe) McGrath, a Jesuit from the Campion Center, in Weston MA. He had been looking for the 3 children of his dear first cousin Lena who passed away while he was in the Seminary. He said that he and two of his sisters were three of Lena's dearest friends. From that moment on Father Joe dropped in with family members: his sister Ann Donovan, his

sister Dolly Ebrecht, and his sister Margaret and her husband Bill Brady. He often invited us to events at the Campion Center and at Boston College High School. He was a very important person in our and in his family. He and I golfed – he always trounced me. He and I went to dinner at the waterfront on Boston where he worked before he went into the seminary.

Father Joe found out about Ellen while on vacation in Ireland. He visited Nellie Morrissey, (one of his paternal Veale cousins). Nellie had heard from her O'Brien first cousin, Ellen's aunt Mary O'Brien O'Flaherty, that Ellen lived in Norwood MA with her husband and 4 sons. (Ellen did not know until that day that she had an Aunt Mary.) Father Joe went to lunch in Norwood and dropped in.

Ellen called her sister to tell her about the visit. Barbara told Ellen that she had been corresponding with Aunt Mary O'Brien O'Flaherty. Ellen's father's brother Tom Connolly had been corresponding with Aunt Mary after they met in England during World War II. Uncle Tom told Barbara about the correspondence. Barbara started corresponding with Aunt Mary after Tom passed away. The correspondence was a well-kept secret.

Aunt Mary O'Brien O'Flaherty visited us and Barbara in California. She provided a lot of oral history for the O'Brien family. Her husband Jim even went to Washington DC with me when I was there on business.

In June of 1993, our youngest son David and his wife Lauren went to Ireland on their honeymoon. He visited his granduncle Tom O'Brien, his wife Lena and their children. David and Lauren came back with more oral information. They told us that we had to go to Ireland to meet the family. They remarked that it seemed that the O'Brien relatives thought the Lauren was their cousin.

In October 1994, Ellen and I visited Ellen's Uncle Tom and his family in Youghal, County Cork. Uncle Tom took us to the Church where his parents were married. We visited his daughter's farm. We went to the cemetery in Knockanore where his mother was buried with her parents and siblings. He and his wife Lena hosted a "Welcome Home Party" where we met nieces and nephews. Ellen got the impression that most of the attendees thought that I was the cousin. When we were leaving Youghal, Tom and Lena gave me a gift of a Waterford Crystal Shillelagh. (I wonder whether they thought that I was the cousin.)

Years later, I found that Knockanore was a 20<sup>th</sup> Century creation, a merger of many townlands. Ellen's great grandparents, her grand uncle John Joseph and her grandmother Ellen lived in Ballyphilip East, Kilcockan. They were enumerated in the 1901 Census of Ireland. In Griffith's Valuation, a 1850s census substitute, there were McGraths and a Veale identified as tenants in Ballyphilip East.

The following are my notes for John Joseph McGrath (Ellen McGrath's older brother);

Sources: Father John Joseph McGrath, SJ (Father Joe); his sister Ann Donovan; his sister Theresa "Dolly" Ebrecht; Aunt Mary O'Brien O'Flaherty, Uncle Tom O'Brien; his children: Bobby, Anne O'Brien-Gardiner, Claire O'Brien Dee; John Joseph's grandsons Tom McGrath and William Brady DDS; John Joseph's great grandson, Paul Michael McGrath DMD; and my wife's countless O'Brien and McGrath cousins.

Web Sites: FamilySearch, Massachusetts Marriages; Census of Ireland 1901 and 1911; Ancestry, US Censuses, 1910, 1930 and 1940; Ancestry; Massachusetts Marriages; Ancestry, WWI Draft Registration Card; Ancestry, Federal and Massachusetts Naturalization records and Ancestry, Massachusetts Death Index

### **Census of Ireland, 1901**

Residents of a house 6 in Ballyphilip East (Kilcockin, Waterford)

SurnameForename	Age	Sex	Relation to head	Religion
McGrath William	50	Male	Head of Family	Roman Catholic
McGrath Margaret	40	Female	Wife	Roman Catholic
McGrath John	18	Male	Son	Roman Catholic
McGrath Ellen	12	Female	Daughter	Roman Catholic
McGrath Thomas	10	Male	Son	Roman Catholic
McGrath Patrick	8	Male	Son	Roman Catholic
McGrath William		Male	Son	Roman Catholic

In 1902, John Joseph he was living in Boston, Suffolk, Massachusetts. In 1907, he married Bridget Cuddihy in Boston at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross.

**Marriage Record Transcript:**

Name: John McGrath  
 Birth Year: abt 1882  
 Birth Place: Ireland  
 Marriage Date: 13 Oct 1907  
 Marriage Place: Boston, Massachusetts, USA  
 Age at Marriage: 25  
 Father: William McGrath  
 Mother: Margaret Neale  
 Spouse: Bridget Cuddihy  
 Spouse Birth Place: Ireland  
 Spouse Age at Marriage: 25  
 Spouse Father: Thomas Cuddihy  
 Spouse Mother: Margaret Linehan

His mother's Maiden Surname was Veale not Neale. I assume that the source was a priest's transcription.

**US Census of 1910 Transcript:**

Name: John J Mcgrath  
 Age in 1910: 27  
 Birth Year: abt 1883  
 Birthplace: Ireland  
 Home in 1910: Boston Ward 3, Suffolk, Massachusetts  
 Street: Bunker Hill St  
 Race: White  
 Gender: Male  
 Immigration Year: 1902  
 Relation to Head of House: Head  
 Marital Status: Married  
 Spouse's Name: Bridget Mcgrath  
 Father's Birthplace: Ireland  
 Mother's Birthplace: Ireland  
 Native Tongue: English  
 Occupation: Laborer  
 Industry: RR (Fght)  
 Employer, Employee or Other: Wage Earner  
 Home Owned or Rented: Rent  
 Farm or House: House  
 Naturalization Status: Alien  
 Able to Read: Yes  
 Able to Write: Yes  
 Years Married: 3  
 Out of Work: N  
 Number of weeks out of work: 0

**Household Members:**

Name	Age
John J Mcgrath	27
Bridget Mcgrath	26
Margaret Mcgrath	1
Thomas F Mcgrath	0

[7/12]

The Census of 1910 indicates that he was 27. It also indicates that he came from Ireland in 1902. It indicates that he was naturalized as a citizen. The naturalization field on his 1910 Census was incorrect.

## **John Joseph McGrath in the U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918**

Name: John Joseph McGrath  
City: Charlestown  
County: Suffolk  
State: Massachusetts  
Birth Date: 22 Feb 1882  
Race: White  
He worked for Quincy Market Cold Storage on Commercial St in Boston.

### **Naturalization Declaration form in 1920. The transcript follows:**

Name: John Joseph McGrath  
Declaration Age: 27  
Record Type: Declaration  
Birth Date: 22 Feb 1892  
Birth Place: County Waterford Ireland  
Arrival Date: 19 Sep 1902  
Arrival Place: Boston, Massachusetts  
Declaration Date: 26 Jan 1920  
Spouse: Bridget

Please note that the following are incorrect: Age and Birth Date. He was born in 1882.

### **US Census of 1930 Transcript**

Name: John J Mcgrath  
Birth Year: abt 1882  
Gender: Male  
Race: White  
Birthplace: Ireland  
Marital Status: Married  
Relation to Head of House: Head  
Home in 1930: Medford, Middlesex, Massachusetts  
Street address: Salem Street  
Ward of City: 3 Part of  
House Number in Cities or Towns: 115  
Dwelling Number: 52  
Family Number: 74  
Home Owned or Rented: Rented  
Home Value: 38  
Radio Set: No  
Lives on Farm: No  
Age at First Marriage: 24  
Attended School: No  
Able to Read and Write: Yes  
Father's Birthplace: Ireland  
Mother's Birthplace: Ireland  
Language Spoken: English  
Immigration Year: 1909  
Naturalization: Naturalized  
Able to Speak English: Yes  
Occupation: Lineman  
Industry: Telephone Co.  
Class of Worker: Wage or salary worker  
Employment: Yes  
Neighbors: View others on page  
Household Members:  
Name Age  
John J Mcgrath 48  
Bridget Mcgrath 46  
Margaret Mcgrath 21  
Theresa Mcgrath 14  
Joseph Mcgrath 12  
Anastatia Mcgrath 10  
Mary A Mcgrath 6

## US Census of 1940

John J McGrath in the 1940 United States Federal Census

Name: John J McGrath  
Age: 57  
Estimated birth year: abt 1883  
Gender: Male  
Race: White  
Birthplace: Irish Free State  
Marital Status: Married  
Relation to Head of House: Head  
Home in 1940: Medford, Middlesex, Massachusetts  
Street: Grant Avenue  
House Number: 140  
Farm: No  
Inferred Residence in 1935: Malden, Middlesex, Massachusetts  
Residence in 1935: Malden, Middlesex, Massachusetts  
Resident on farm in 1935: No  
Citizenship: Naturalized  
Sheet Number: 5A  
Number of Household in Order of Visitation: 91  
Occupation: Lineman  
House Owned or Rented: Rented  
Value of Home or Monthly Rental if Rented: 34  
Attended School or College: No  
Highest Grade Completed: Elementary school, 6th grade  
Hours Worked Week Prior to Census: 48  
Class of Worker: Wage or salary worker in private work  
Weeks Worked in 1939: 52  
Income: 1400  
Income Other Sources: No  
Household Members:  
Name Age  
John J McGrath 57  
Bridgade McGrath 59  
Thresse McGrath 24  
Anna McGrath 19  
Mary McGrath 16

## John McGrath Massachusetts, Death Index, 1901-1980

Name John McGrath  
Death Date 1955  
Death Place Medford, Massachusetts, USA  
Volume Number 67  
Page number 333  
Index Volume Number 115  
Reference Number F63.M363 v.115

His gravestone in Holy Cross Cemetery in Malden, Massachusetts indicates that he was born in 1883 and died in 1954. I believe that he was born in 1882 and died in 1955.

## SUMMARY:

From gathering the on-line material on John Joseph McGrath, I learned that my wife's great grandparents (William McGrath and Margaret Veale) and their children lived in Ballyphilip East, Kilcockan in 1901 and 1911.

I learned that there was a Veale family in Ballyphilip East, Kilcockan in Griffith's Valuation. McGraths were in Ballyphilip East and in Carnglass another Kilcockan townland.

I learned how to use the Griffith's Valuation Maps in AskAboutIreland.ie to pinpoint Ballyphilip East, Kilcockan where William McGrath and Margaret Veale McGrath (John Joseph's and Ellen McGrath O'Brien's parents) lived in 1901 and 1911.

I learned that McGrath's met the two ships that Helena O'Brien travelled to Massachusetts on in 1930 and 1936.

I learned that Lena O'Brien Connolly was born in Fermoy, Cork, Ireland.

I learned enough about Irish research of the McGrath family to be bestowed the honorary title of McGrath Family Historian by Tom McGrath, the oldest living descendant of John Joseph McGrath and Bridget Cuddihy.

I learned about and met many of the wonderful descendants of William McGrath and his wife Margaret Veale McGrath. They would be proud of all their descendants who are scattered in Ireland, Australia, England, and the United States.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

My thanks to my wife Ellen who has facilitated (and maybe even endured) my passion for genealogy research, seminars, article-writing and volunteering.

Also, thanks to Ellen's McGrath families who have provided oral history etc. Father Joe McGrath and his siblings Anne, Dolly and Margaret started the quest. Father Joe's nieces and nephews have been amazing sources.

Special thanks to Paul Michael McGrath, DMD who has recently come into our lives and provided more information on his branch of the McGrath family including a copy of the gravestone for his grandparents, John Joseph McGrath and Bridget Cuddihy McGrath.

In addition, thanks to Ellen's O'Brien family who have provided oral history and Civil Registration index records.

Special thanks to Claire O'Brien Dee who lives in Knockanore. She has provided an enormous amount of oral information. Claire also provided a photo of the gravestone for Ellen's great grandparent, William McGrath and Ellen Veale McGrath in Knockanore, Waterford County. Claire's parents, Uncle Tom and Aunt Lena were immense. Claire's siblings, Anne and Bobby, have helped a lot.

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Your corrections, comments and suggestions are appreciated. Please Email me at [joe-apg@norwoodlight.com](mailto:joe-apg@norwoodlight.com).

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