

RESEARCH – Irish Church Records at the Latter Day Saints (LDS) Family History Libraries (FHL)

By Joe Petrie

Have you been told that vital Irish Church records (Births, Christenings and Marriages) were destroyed? I have – many times! Now, I respond: “If you believe that I have a bridge for sale! Do you want to buy it cheap?”

My reply is not wise crack. It is an attempt to make the point that there are enormous holdings of Irish Church records available on microfilm for viewing at Family History Centers’ Genealogy Libraries (basically part of the Family History Library, FHL, in Salt Lake City Utah). Bad news: The tapes are fairly inexpensive and must be ordered and paid for in advance. The good news is that the FHL microfilms – literally a mountain of tapes are being digitized and validated. Thousands of volunteers are working on the films with a goal of digitizing the collection by the end of this decade. My understanding is that in FamilySearch.org where possible images of the original records will be available. That is really the best news because if there are conflicts, the user can look at the image.

Records are available on microfilm for lots of Irish parishes starting in the late 1700s. My wife’s paternal family parish is the RC Parish of Oughterard, (Kilcummin), County Galway, Ireland. The Church christening and marriage records start at 1810.

Our FHL experience: We ordered the microfilm tape for the minimum time-frame at the LDS Family History Center in Franklin, Massachusetts. Oughterard was not the only parish on it. We were notified when the tape was received. We read the tape’s records and immediately paid to extend the period to the maximum period allowed. (The information was priceless!) For a lot of the information on the tape, we simply took notes or transcribed it. For about 50 pages of the records, using the Center’s equipment we copied the pages onto one of our flash drives for 25 cents per page.

A version of Ellen’s father’s Pedigree Chart follows. There are three sources: (1) Ellen’s paternal Aunt Mary provided an oral history; (2) Ellen’s paternal grand-aunt Catherine provided additional information; and (3) the microfilm. We have been working on validating the records in the 4th and 5th generations from the information that we collected. Note that on the Pedigree Chart, Ellen’s father was the only one not christened or married in Oughterard. In the 4th generation, Mary and Bridget Melia were sisters. Also, two Conneelys in the 4th may have been siblings.

