

RESEARCH

Where in Ireland did my Cape Breton Parental Ancestors William O'Brien, his wife Ellen Laffan and their son Michael O'Brien come from? And were they related to the Lingan Laffins?

By Joe Petrie

Sometime around 1980, Charles "Chick" Buchanan of New Waterford and Sydney, one of my genealogy mentors, told me about my O'Brien ancestors. Chick really did not know a lot. He simply said that William and Ellen were born around 1800 in Ireland and their son Michael was born about 1820 in Ireland. He also said that they likely migrated to Nova Scotia sometime between the Censuses of 1838 and Michael's marriage in North Sydney in the mid to late 1840s.

For over 20 years, I really did not do a lot of work with this O'Brien family. Recently, because of a question about the family that I really could not answer at the time - about where were they from, I decided to use a technique that I learned working with fellow genealogy volunteers in the Genealogy Library of the Irish Cultural Center of New England. Specifically, when clients would ask us for help ascertaining where in Ireland they should visit to see where their ancestors lived, we'd search Irish Parish records, Civil Registration records, Marriage and Birth records, Census Records and finally Census Substitute records. When we resorted to using the Irish Substitutes, we assumed that married Irish immigrants were likely from the same parish. Please note that often because of the availability of US Immigration, Naturalization and Census information, very often we could quickly pin-point the Township and County. Also please note that infrequently, we had to admit that we simply could not pin-point a location using: the on-line Irish Birth and Marriage records, Censuses of 1901 or 1911, and Census Substitutes such as the Griffith's Valuation or Tithe Applotment information.

Back to my ancestors: After I unsuccessfully checked Marriage and Birth records in Irishgenealogy, FamilySearch, Ancestry, and death records in NovaScotiagenealogy, I focused on the Tithe Applotment records - because of the date range that Chick gave me (1838 – 1847). Using the Tithe Applotment Books, 1823-37 - National Archives of Ireland, the combination of O'Brien and Laffan show up in a following Parishes of Limerick and Tipperary:

Parish	County
Agliscormick	Limerick
Caherconlish	Limerick
Galbally	Limerick
Grean	Limerick
Emly	Tipperary
Templeachally	Tipperary
Templemore	Tipperary
Thurles	Tipperary

Note that because O'Brien can be spelled so many different ways I used an Asterisk wild card in the National Archives Search Engine (i.e., O*Brien).

Was Ellen Laffan O'Brien related to the Lingan Laffins? I am not sure! They could have been. Why? In Lingan, there were two brothers John and Thomas. John and his wife Mary are buried in St. Joseph's. The headstone reads: Laffan Mary 1865 1939 Wife of John T. Laffan. The other gravestones are for Laffins.