

STONE WALLS: A DIFFERENT APPROACH

Many serious Agnew genealogists in the Ulster Diaspora have labored hard trying to find links to other disconnected family branches across the world. With rare exceptions, they have been equally unsuccessful finding links back to Northern Ireland or Scotland. A few lines with “accepted” descents lack solid documentation and may be erroneous, in part or *in toto*.

What we haven’t done

Other ethnicities with similar stonewalls resort to a second approach. Early British migrants to New England and the South as well as Dutch or Germans in the Middle Atlantic areas also work *forward* from known descents in the homeland group(s) from which they departed. Preferably the projection base includes 3 to 4 generations in the homeland *antedating* the transoceanic voyages. Puritans, Quakers, and Palatines are typical of these groups.

To my knowledge no concerted attempt to employ this methodology has been used among the millions of Scots-Irish descendants scattered around the world. At most, efforts seem to concentrate on post migration descents from a particular individual- or immediate-family group. Typically such publications; for example, **THE IRWIN/ERWINS**, *report* a collection of *American* branches (often dominated by subsidizers of the publication costs) plus a scattering of descents for selected high status bearers of the name in the country of origin.. The works almost uniformly lack any solid documentation, fail to tie branches together conclusively or to progenitors in Scotland and largely sidestep the inconvenience of intermediate residence in Ulster. Yet Ulster is the essential stepping stone that eventually led to the early, widespread and continuing willingness of the Scots Irish to venture across the ocean.

Why we should look to Ulster and why now

What has changed?

The *absence or inaccessibility* of data and primary records has long been a barrier to Ulster research. Many Ulster repositories allowed documents or microfilms to be viewed only on site and sharply restricted access except to recognized “scholars”. Now access is rapidly expanding: in part because of powerful new technology and burgeoning public interest. But also, because “knowledge” has become a commodity with the increasing appropriation of the field by giants like Google. The area has long been a province of scholarly institutions and governments and they are responding to the competition by opening more of their holdings to easy public access.

Enormous amounts of unrecognized and/or unavailable material are not only being made accessible but readily *searchable*. . Repositories like PRONI and the Ulster Historical Foundation (UHF) are systematically making more available electronically. The Foundation has long provided singular scholarly works on Ulster topics that are not readily available overseas. They are currently publishing, at reasonable prices, new reference material and reprints of their out-of-print works which they will ship overseas. With technical help of UHF the Presbyterian Historical Society has recently opened a rudimentary website and is inviting those interested to

join their Guild and aid in the project to put their holdings online. Ulster Presbyterian records are the *key* to family details for Scots Irish immigrants worldwide.

Why not start in Scotland?

Unfortunately, Galloway parish records are even scarcer than Ulster. Of the 86 parishes in Dumfries and Galloway *only 3* have records *antedating 1685*. Moreover, it would submerge the small group that went to Ulster during the Plantation period in a much larger population of the same names making the migrants harder to identify and follow.

However, we plan to utilize the Agnew extracts from the National Archives of Scotland, particularly those recorded by David Dobson in his ongoing series as well as details from index listing from the Agnew of Lochnaw papers(now online).and related sources from the NAS. In 2011 we look forward to the indexed British Calendar of State Papers. for *Ireland* to come online.

So what is missing?

What is needed is an authoritative list that identifies individuals of interest at a definitive time and place, in other words, a "*census*".

What has been lacking for Northern Ireland is an *early* enumeration that would parallel or the antedate the earliest immigration period. The 1901 census of Ireland is little help to those who emigrated in the Famine period (1846-52) and worthless for those who came earlier. Griffiths Evaluations was decades in execution and only reached Antrim in 1860 – again too little, too late. The Tithe Applotments are more helpful for Ulster because they were collected in the 1820-30 before the massive disruptions of the Famine. However, they covered only selected portions of the population outside cities and, except for the index, are available only at the Public Record Office in Belfast.

But now we have it!

For a decade nearly all my Irish reference books were trapped in a storage locker with limited access times and 7 miles away. With my move back to New York State I have been able to organize my whole reference library on open shelves. In the process I rediscovered a slim volume generally only available in Belfast, *Heads and Hearths, the Hearth Money Rolls and Poll Tax Returns for County Antrim 1660-1669*. This is a painstaking reconstruction of comparison of the only essentially complete "census" of an Irish county for the 17th century. Happily, the county is Antrim and, as the text of the Hereditary Sheriffs of Wigtownshire demonstrates, Antrim was the focus of Agnew of Lochnaw activities in Ireland.

Although there is no name index, householder names are meticulously recorded by townland for every parish in the county. By reading and rechecking block paragraphs of names for each of the hundreds of townland involved, it has been possible to It is possible to construct an index of Agnews households by Barony, Parish and Townland for the period 1666-1669 with a rough indication of economic status. The households have been plotted on the map of Antrim so the area of distribution of Agnew settlers is clearly illustrated. This provides a "skeleton" on which

17th century information on individual Agnews can be assembled. Both distribution and other information can then be compared with Antrim Agnews in later periods.