

Stone Walls: A Different Approach

STONE WALLS is an on-going project to examine the History and Migrations of the various branches of a Scots-Irish family, the Agnews of Ulster and Galloway. All segments are interim working papers presented so that readers can follow and comment on topics as they develop. Over time added data and documentation may alter interpretations and conclusions.

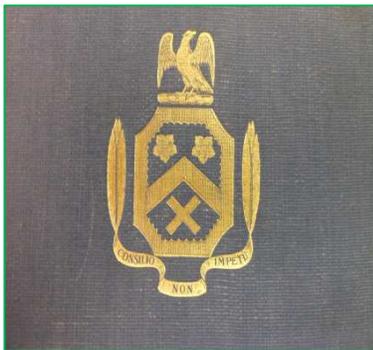
Part 1. Could James Agnew of Marsh Creek Be of the Cadet Line; the Agnews of Dalreagle?©

INTRODUCTION

Based on findings at the completion of the Armorial Gravestones series we start a new series examining the origin, descent and history of James Agnew of Marsh Creek, Pennsylvania, and his immediate family as revealed by currently available records in North America and the United Kingdom. The narrative in the nearly century-old *Book of Agnews* will be compared to greatly extended data found on the Web and now accessible to everyone. The object is to update, test, document and/or correct the history and descent laid out in the Mary Virginia Agnew's family history and associated manuscripts by Prof Riggs. Other contemporary Agnews in central Pennsylvania will be examined for connections to the Marsh Creek line as will alternate possible antecedents in Antrim and Galloway.

HOW AND WHY WERE THE DALREAGLE ARMS ON JAMES AGNEW'S GRAVESTONE AT MARSH CREEK, PENNSYLVANIA?

Obviously, at the time of James Agnew of Marsh Creek died in 1770 someone wanted an armorial on his gravestone as was the fashionable mark of success at the time. Either the family or the stonecutter chose what was a "suitable" design was whether or not they knew the descent implied by the specific details.



Armorial on Gravestone of
James Agnew (1711-1777)

Given what we have learned about armorial stones over the two centuries between their appearance in Scotland and James Agnew's death in colonial Pennsylvania, there is no certainty it was not merely the stone cutter's suggestion of an Agnew design he had access to and a strong likelihood the Agnew family did not know the specifics of Lochnaw arms or that they were registered and regulated. In fact, the stone was most likely carved by one of the Bighams, a family with ties by marriage to Agnews in south Antrim and Galloway.

The Bighams are now believed to have been the craftsmen who introduced or facilitated the use of armorial gravestones in colonial Scots Irish settlements. They proved increasingly proficient in both adapting existing armorial designs and creating original designs over a century including the substitution of a Balmoral Bonnet in place of the helm atop the wreath on some stones as colonists' devotion to the Crown soured under the House of Hanover.

By the time James died the phenomenon had been popular for a quarter century among those successful enough to afford it. Members of the Bigham family continued to arrive in Pennsylvania over 20 or more years, from the 1730's to the 1750's or later, after the armorial designs were well established. With a going business to supplement a frontier barter economy, it is likely that the more skilled later Bighams brought up-to-date designs and patterns as well. It is noteworthy that the Dalreagle variant of Agnew arms was registered with the Lord Lyon in 1752.

The Marsh Creek Agnews do not appear to have sketched out a particular descent from the Lochnaw line at an early date as they repeatedly addressed queries to knowledgeable people in North America, Ulster and Scotland that are documented online from at least the mid-19th century. Various descendants continued to actively "shop" for a Scottish Agnew connection, e.g. from the Editor of the New York "Blue Book", as late as 1912. Focus more specifically on the House of Lochnaw seems to appear after the first Edition of Sir Andrew's the *Hereditary Sheriffs* became available in the United States. If *any possible connection* was even vaguely suggested by the authorities the family approached, it was to the ill-fated Galdenoch line that had lost their lands - and thus their status - by the time James of Marsh Creek was born.

WHO WERE THE AGNEWS OF DALREAGLE ?

I was startled to find no online history of the Agnew of Dalreagle family since I had only passing knowledge of the descent. Sir Andrew has given short shrift to the cadet lines of the Lochnaw family in his *Hereditary Sheriffs...*¹. Also there appear to be none for the other Agnew cadet lines on the Internet either. Curiously, the histories of their homes, castles or mansions, are widely available and readily found.²

For the Dalreagles, descents can be followed in *Burke's Peerage* or the website, "The Peerage" and a more fully annotated descent written by Sir Crispin that appeared in a 2004 Agnew Association Newsletter.

Otherwise, online there seems to be only a brief note in James Boswell's diaries recording a meeting and subsequent dinner with Alexander, Third of Dalreagle and his family at Myrtoun Agnew in October 1762.³ Boswell, with his typical condescension, describes Alexander, 3rd of Dalreagle as, "*an agreeable little man enough*" (whereas the Pennsylvania family was termed "tall or large"). Penelope, daughter of Sir Andrew Agnew, 5th Bart. of Lochnaw, Alexander's wife is not mentioned as they were not married until the following May. However, Boswell

¹ Agnew, A. *Hereditary Sheriffs of Wigtownshire...*, 2nd Ed, Vol II, pp 433-35; 1893.

² The story of these cadet lines, with information on descendants, includes much of interest to Agnews everywhere and, when more information on each is in hand, I hope to write summaries for IAN.

³ Source:<http://www.Jamesboswell.info/>

deemed Alexander's widowed mother, Mary Stewart of Penninghame Parrish, "*a genteel old woman much like a gentlewoman. Lord Kames said he had seen few better.*"!

Taken together, there is more than enough information on the Dalreagle line to determine whether they may be the antecedents of James of Marsh Creek, Pennsylvania as the arms on his tombstone could imply.

Alexander Agnew, who was to become the First of Dalreagle, was the illegitimate son of Andrew Agnew of Lochnaw, 10th Hereditary Sheriff of Wigtownshire and 3rd Baronet of Lochnaw.

Based on life events outlined below Alexander was born *say* 1655 -1665. His mother was reputed to be Agnes Baillie. To date no station or family connections have been suggested for her and she may have had none of importance. However, that her name has survived is unusual in the absence of significant connections.

Important dates and events in his history include:

1684 Wigtownshire Parish Lists, he was living alone in Wigtown and already identified as "Sheriff's Clerk";

1686, 12 March legitimated by Crown Charter;

1687, 1 April acquired sasine of the barony of Myrton-McKie; and later changed the name to Myrton-Agnew;

1695 Hearth Rolls of Wigtownshire. His residence in Wigtown boasted 6 hearths and he is listed near the household of William Coltrane, Provost of Wigtown, and his future father-in-law who also had 6 hearths. In addition he has 10 tenants living in nearby Kirkinner, Minnagaffe and Penninghame Parishes, each with a hearth that is entered on his tax "list";

1702, October witness to the proving of his father's will, Sir Andrew of Lochnaw, 2nd Bart.;

About 1704 he married, first, Mary Coltrane, b. 1674, daughter of William Coltrane, Provost of Wigtown, and Agnes Ramsay;

From 1704-1713 6 children born to Alexander and Mary;

Patrick, born ca 1705,

Margaret, born 27 November 1707,

Andrew, born 20 February 1709,

Alexander, born 23 October 1710,

James, born 5 October 1712,

Eliza, born 10 September 1713.

After Mary's death (date unknown) he married Barbara Vans (probably daughter of Alexander Vaus/Vans and Grizzel Agnew) by whom he had:

Agnes, born unk.

Alexander Agnew 1st of Dalreagle died 1730 and was succeeded by his eldest son, Patrick.

It is obvious that James Agnew of Marsh Creek and his putative brothers were exact contemporaries of the children of Alexander Agnew, 1st of Dalreagle.

Could he have been James' father, thus explaining the appearance of the Dalreagle arms on James' tombstone?

Clearly, Alexander Agnew of Dalreagle had a son, James, with very similar birth dates but those are notoriously unreliable in the period so that it would not on the face negate the possibility.

On the American side *The Book of Agnews* by Mary Virginia Agnew published in 1927, and the associated versions by Prof. Riggs through the latest of 1942, claim:

- James Agnew of Marsh Creek or the Manor of Masque, was born 31 July 1711 in Ireland or Scotland and
- came to the American colonies from Ireland in 1717. He is said to have been
- accompanied by his father, allegedly named James, born 1671 in Ireland with at least 1 to 2 identified prior generations there at "Balloo" in Antrim or Down.
- An older brother, Samuel, born in 1709, came with them and possibly a third son may have come too, John, born 1707, of whom they found no further record.

First let us examine a few weaknesses in this American narrative. For that solid sources are required.

With all the conflicting versions of James and his family I accept as correct the basic information on James' family as listed in his bible. A photographed image of the Title Page and the Family Record page are attached as Figure 2. [See Appendix]

The second source I will on rely as most likely to be correct is Dr. J.L. Ziegler's *An Authentic History of Donegal Presbyterian Church Located in East Donegal Township, Lancaster Co., Pa.*⁴

Dr. Ziegler was well respected and scholarly with a near lifelong connection to this church. He knew the grandchildren of founding families and consulted them and Dr. Egle, the Pennsylvania State Librarian in preparing his history. In what, today, we would call his Mission Statement he wrote:

*"The history of Donegal Church was undertaken with the desire to correct some of the many erroneous statements that have been promulgated at various times concerning the church, the pastors and families which constituted the congregation. Much time and labor have been devoted to the procuring and examining authentic documents, such as the records of the church, the records of Presbytery, Presbyterian history, wills, land-titles and family records. **Nothing traditional has been introduced as authentic.**"* (emphasis added)

A 1717 arrival in Pennsylvania is very unlikely. The requests were addressed in 1717 but arrangements and permissions had not been completed for the initial large group of Irish migrants to be set up on the frontier of then *settled parts* of New England and Pennsylvania until late in the following year; i.e. 1718. Furthermore, the Marsh Creek area was deep in Indian Territory far from the border of William Penn's grant at that date. The advocates of this James Agnew story have offered no explanation for their whereabouts over the 2 decades from "1717" to about 1738/39 when members of the family make their first documented appearance in colonial records.

Even Prof. Riggs conceded James Sr. left a "remarkably faint footprint on history". He cites no record at all and the only possible hint of his existence I have found is a 1737/8 entry of "James Agnew, *cooper*" in a mob of illegal squatters on a gore of land (which included the Manor of Masque) in dispute between Maryland and Pennsylvania. In the same riotous group were a James and a Samuel Agnew, not otherwise defined. Elsewhere, James, born 1711, is said to have been a journeyman *blacksmith* in 2 passing comments. My own conclusion is that James, *Sr.*'s existence in Pennsylvania is unlikely in the absence of some documentary support.

As to brother Samuel, the publications centering on James Agnew are largely silent beyond reference to a Marsh Creek gravestone for "Samuel and his wife, Mary". However, our recent gravestone study has revealed that the monument is for a 3 yr old Samuel and an 8 month old Mary who died in 1773 and 1760 respectively. Brother Samuel has proved very elusive and I would have rejected him too except for 2 very solid bits of evidence found to date, the first is the riot list and the second is that a Samuel filed an early request for a land warrant at Marsh Creek.

Now the discovery of stones for several young Agnews with design links to the James Armorial stone have to be accounted for. There are passing references to Samuel having no children and

⁴ Any one interested in the Agnews of Marsh Creek should include this volume among his reference works. It can be downloaded from www.archive.org.

these *may* be Samuel's children who died young. More work must be done to clarify both Samuel and the children.

Likewise, after lengthy digging I have found a candidate for the untraced brother, John. A *John Agnew* in a group of militiamen pursuing a raiding party was killed by Indians in 1756 not far from Marsh Creek. This needs to be investigated further, along with a family of Agnews who appeared in the records of the same area a little later. Both facts raise questions as to why James' eldest son by his first wife, John, should have also eventually settled in that place.

Could these 2 or 3 Pennsylvania men, James, Samuel and John, actually be fitted into Alexander of Dalreagle's family? **Yes**, it is technically and obstetrically possible although unlikely. (see paper on Mary Kennedy for physical parameters involved).

Moreover, Alexander Agnew, 1st of Dalreagle led a very active and public life in Galloway and his parents and grandparents are equally anchored in Galloway. I see no way to accommodate the very clear earlier Irish connections of James Agnew of Marsh Creek, Pennsylvania, within the Agnew of Dalreagle well-documented Galloway time scale, particularly when Alexander died in 1730, a well-recorded event. Moreover his descendants are all equally well-accounted for *outside* North America but *not* in Ireland. In addition in 1730 there was as yet no evidence for James Sr. and family in colonial records and James was too young to have either the legal or church standing in his own right even on the Pennsylvania frontier.

Naming Patterns would seem to offer an even more substantial impediment. The Scots and Ulster Irish have been wedded to a limited and highly repetitive number of given names well into the 19th century and we all have learned eventually that they cannot be depended upon to *establish connections*. However, they *can* sometimes point to a possible affiliation being unlikely or offer alternate candidate given names for possible antecedents.

In Galloway the populace seems to have been particularly wedded to the naming practice tabulated below. Source. *The Wigtownshire Pages*, <http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/>

Sons		
Birth Order	Named After	Variation
1 st born	Paternal grandfather	Maternal grandfather
2 nd born	Maternal grandfather	Paternal grandfather
3 rd born	Father	
4 th born	Father's oldest brother	Paternal gt grandfather
5 th born	Mother's oldest brother	Maternal grandfather gt

Daughters		
Birth Order	Named after	Variation
1 st born	Maternal grandmother	Paternal grandmother
2 nd born	Paternal grandmother	Maternal grandmother
3 rd born	Mother	
4 th born	Mother's oldest sister	Maternal great grandmother
5 th born	Father's oldest sister	Paternalgt grandmother

In addition to the family pattern, after a child's death the next- of that sex was often given the dead child's name – sometimes serially more than once if the name was particularly important to the family – and it was nearly as common to name a daughter by a later wife after the deceased first wife, especially if she was from a family of prominence.

Hence it may be illuminating to compare names and naming patterns in the contemporaneous Dalreagle and Marsh Creek Agnew families.

Alexander, 1st Dalreagle, son of Andrew, by first wife Mary Coltrane

Patrick for paternal gt-grandfather, Sir Patrick of Lochnaw 1st Bart,

Margaret for paternal gt-grandmother, Margaret Kennedy

Andrew for his father, Andrew, 3nd of Lochnaw Bart

Alexander for himself

James for his eldest (half) brother, Sir James, 4th Bart

Eliza for ?

By second wife Barbara Vans/Vaus

Agnes for maternal grandmother, Agnes Ramsey mother of Mary Coltrane

A similar pattern can be demonstrated over many generations of the Agnews of Lochnaw with Andrew overwhelmingly dominant and Patrick notable but less frequent. It is discernible, too, in the much later Dalreagle branch where Alexander predominates with Patrick, again the second favorite before rigid naming patterns relaxed.

James Agnew of Marsh Creek However, when we turn to the children of James, their numbers and their birth order often vary but the following list is taken from the image of his bible – said to be written in his own hand – and should be authentic. Nonetheless, it has always

disturbed me that, if he made the entries, that he did not seem to know – or chose not to record – his first wife’s maiden name here or elsewhere nor does her son, John.

By first wife, Margaret (surname unknown)

1. John
2. Janet

By his second wife, Rebecca Scott

3. Samuel
4. Martha
5. James
6. David
7. Agnes
8. Margaret
9. Rebecca
10. Sarah
11. Abraham
12. Ann

In the first generation there were 5 sons: ***John, Samuel, James, David***, Abraham d.y.

In the second generation: John had no children

Samuel had 4 sons: ***James, Samuel, Andrew***, possibly Enoch

James had 4 sons: ***James, John, Samuel, David***

David had 8 sons: ***James (died 1793), John, David, Robert, Samuel, Smith, Gibson, James (again b. 1794)***

The dominant and persistent male given names are: John, James, Samuel and David and they continue to predominate for many generations.

With completely different but clearly dominant given names in the contemporaneous Dalreagle and Marsh Creek lines it would seem strong evidence *against any blood connection* between the branches.

It may also be worthwhile to compare the Marsh Creek dominant names with names of the chiefly family, the Agnews of Lochnaw where:

John occurs only very occasionally,

James does not appear until about the end of the 1600's and may reflect the close relationship between Sir Patrick and James VI of Scotland, while

David does not turn up until the beginning of the 19th century and

Samuel appears not at all.

Conclusion:

For the above reasons alone I believe the occurrence of the Dalreagle Arms on James Agnew's gravestone in Pennsylvania provides no support for *any* blood connection. Rather the arms were used:

1. Either by accident due to the general popularity of heraldic stones at that time and place or,
2. by design to imply a descent or a higher social connection.

The next paper will continue to assess more claims, errors and defects in the history of James of Marsh Creek in Pennsylvania as presented in the *Book of Agnews*⁵ along with potential connections back to Ulster and Scotland.

⁵ By Mary Virginia Agnew, 1926.

APPENDIX

Title and Record Page

James Agnew Family Bible

