

Introduction to the Welch Letters

By Frances Murphy

During the 19th century, hundreds of thousands of our people emigrated to the United States. Some of them never returned to Ireland and all contact with them came to a halt. Luckily many of them kept in touch and as a result a reservoir of invaluable correspondence was generated which painted a picture of how people lived on both sides of the Atlantic. Imagine our surprise and delight when a bundle of such correspondence was sent to us in November 2019. The correspondence was sent by Bob Welch from Boston whose forefathers came from Clashaganny, Milltown. Bob let us know that he was coming to Ireland and that he wanted to meet us in Milltown on the 23rd December 2019. We met Bob and his wife Maura and 2 sons Dylan and Drew and brought them to Clashaganny and showed them the probable site of their old homestead of which there is now no trace. There are no Welchs in Clashaganny and indeed there were none there in the mid 1850s as they do not appear in Griffith's Valuation which was done around that time. The family have kindly agreed to allow us take copies of the letters and make them available on our website and this has now been done.

Just a few observations on the content of the letters

- a) Many of these people lived through the famine and four of the letters were written just before the famine and one after it (1849) and you will note the change in tone. The earlier letters show a mother's heartbreak and longing for her exiled children while at the same time scolding them (as mothers have always done!) for not writing more often.
- b) The pre-famine letters make no mention of poverty.
- c) Because of the age of the letters, it was difficult to decipher them and we acknowledge the great work done by Bob's relatives in this regard.
- d) The letters are in the possession of the Welch family who thankfully decided to retain them throughout the years.
- e) The letters could not be described as begging for money.
- f) They did not emphasise the poverty of the people.

It is noted that the residents of Parkroe / Clashaganny were closely linked with the families in the neighbouring townland of Carrowreagh, all of whom were tenants of the Bodkin estate. Many references were made to the Loftus family and while we cannot establish a direct link with the current Loftus family, it is almost certainly the same family.

While researching this matter, we discovered the following

Arrived in New York from the port of Galway on the 19th November 1851

Patt Carney Aged 21

Biddy Nolan Aged 16

Sabina Walsh Aged 21

Thomas Connolly Aged 25

These were all Clashaganny / Parkroe surnames and it was usual at the time that neighbours would travel together when emigrating. Indeed, we are wondering is Sabina the Sibby mentioned by her mother in the letter.

Incidentally, the only family of all those mentioned that residing in Clashaganny / Parkroe are the Carneys.