



OAK ANCESTRY

'Shaped by history'

Family Research Report on the Heaney-
McDonagh family of county Longford

*(All names and dates mentioned in this sample report are fictitious
and in no way do they correspond to historical records or images
mentioned and shown in this report.)*



Oak Ancestry

CONTENTS:

WHAT WE KNOW:..... 2

FOCUS OF REPORT:..... 2

INFORMATION ON IRISH GENEALOGICAL RECORDS:..... 3

SURNAME ORIGIN: 4

 McDonagh:..... 4

 Heaney: 5

JAMES HEANEY-MCDONAGH: 6

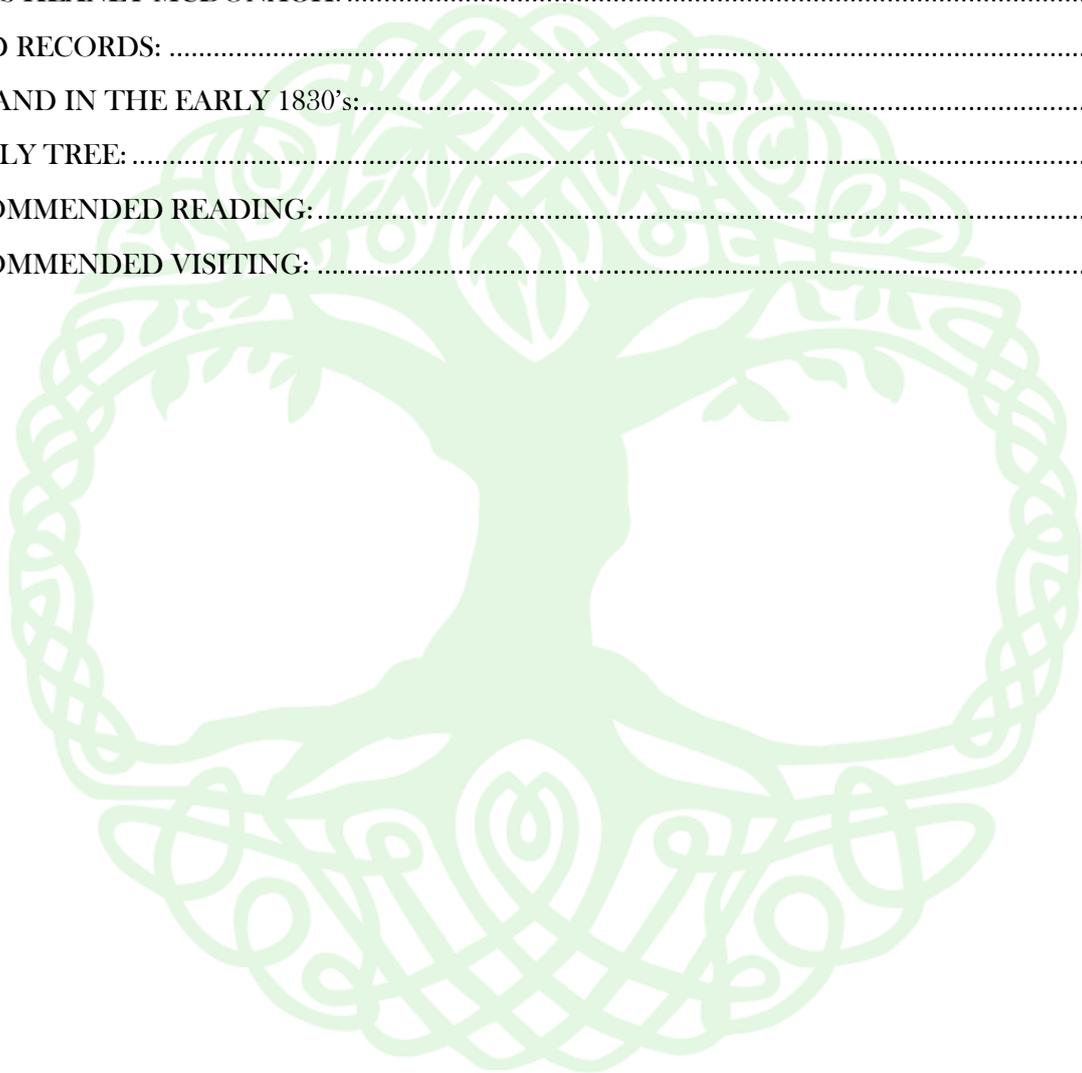
LAND RECORDS: 10

IRELAND IN THE EARLY 1830's:..... 12

FAMILY TREE: 14

RECOMMENDED READING:..... 15

RECOMMENDED VISITING: 15



WHAT WE KNOW:

The initial information provided by Eliza McDonagh is that her ancestor James Heaney-McDonagh was born in Ballymahon, Co. Longford, located in the midlands of Ireland. Eliza has provided Oak Ancestry with the following information:

- ❖ James, it is thought, was born on 28 December 1825 in Ballymahon, Co. Longford.
- ❖ It is also believed James' parents died when he was quite young leaving James to be brought up by his uncle, a Rev. Fr. O'Donnell.
- ❖ In later life, James went to work in the General Post Office in Dublin where he later enlisted in the British army and was drafted into the Eighth Royal Cavalry.
- ❖ This post brought James to Ayrshire in Scotland where he met Delia McLaughlin whom he later married in 1855.
- ❖ It is believed he then went onto take up mining work in Scotland and England before emigrating once again to the U.S in 1870.

FOCUS OF REPORT:

The objective of the following research report is to add to our client's knowledge of her Irish ancestry with a focus on the Heaney-McDonagh family of Longford while also looking into their connection with the O'Donnell family as mentioned above.

INFORMATION ON IRISH GENEALOGICAL RECORDS:

Before we delve into your family's history here are some points with regard to Irish historical records which need to be stated. During the Civil War, many Irish records of significant genealogical value were unfortunately destroyed when the Public Records Office situated in the Four Courts, Dublin (where they were stored) was hit by a shell during warfare in 1922.



Among those records largely destroyed were:

- Irish census returns from 1821-1851. (Irish census records from 1861-1891 were destroyed before this time by Government order.)
- About two-thirds of pre-1870 Church of Ireland parish registers.
- All wills probated in Ireland until the time of destruction.

However, all is not lost as there are many surviving Irish genealogical records which can assist the family historian in adding to our knowledge of our Irish ancestors. These records include:

- Census fragments from 1821 to 1851 (varies from county to county).
- Full official 1901 and 1911 Irish national census records.
- Parish records.
- Civil records of births, marriages and deaths.
- Land/Property records.
- Index of wills probated in Ireland.
- Newspaper records, parish and county annals and court records.
- Various historical and academic sources (where applicable).

Regarding the 1901 and 1911 census returns, please allow for discrepancies with your ancestors ages as it is possible that their given age may vary among corresponding records. This occurred due to reasons such as illiteracy and the introduction of the pension in 1908, which prompted many to increase their age on public record between 1901 and 1911 in order for them to be

eligible to receive the pension payments. Another reason is that people in the early twentieth century were not preoccupied with record keeping and ages.

Regarding the Land/Property records, the two main sources for this research report are the Tithe Applotment Books and the Griffiths Valuation Survey. The Tithe Applotment Books are Irish pre-Famine land/property records which were compiled between 1823 and 1837. The tithe was a tax owed by any tenant on the island of Ireland who occupied more than one acre of agricultural land. Money collected from this tax went towards the upkeep of the Established Church of that time (Church of Ireland) and was payable by people of all religious denominations. In 1831 the country was around 80% Roman Catholic and 8% Presbyterian therefore this tax aroused much resentment on religious grounds. The following information can be found in the Tithe Applotment Books: name of head of family (both forename and surname); county; parish; townland; the amount of land held and the amount of tithe paid.

In the mid nineteenth century, in order to financially support the poor within their poor law union¹, every landowner had to pay a tax. In order to calculate the amount of tax owed by each landowner, a country wide land survey was carried out by a man called Richard Griffith. This survey called Griffith's, or the Primary, Valuation of Ireland was published between 1848 and 1864. The valuation was arranged by county; barony; poor law union; civil parish and town land. It lists every landholder and householder in Ireland at the time.²

SURNAME ORIGIN:

McDonagh:

Starting with the surname McDonagh, this surname owns several variations. Among these are MacDonnchadha, McDonncha, McDonough, Donnaha and McDona.³ All records discussed in the following report have been cross-checked with surname variants.

The Surnames of Ireland by Edward MacLysaght is a detailed guide giving a wealth on the background of Irish family names; more than 4,000 Gaelic, Norman and Anglo-Irish surnames have been recorded in this comprehensive guide. In this book, MacLysaght has indeed recorded this particular surname: '**Mac Donagh** *Mac Donnchadha* (son of Donagh). A branch

¹ Poor Law Union's were comprised of regional authorities known as the Board of Guardians (the wealthy elite of a given parish) from 1838. Their role was to grant aid and assist in the emigration of paupers from poverty-stricken areas.

² James R. Reilly, *Richard Griffith and His Valuations of Ireland*, (Baltimore, 2000).

³ [http://www.irishtimes.com/ancestor/surname/index.cfm?fuseaction=Go.&UserID=.](http://www.irishtimes.com/ancestor/surname/index.cfm?fuseaction=Go.&UserID=)

of the MacDermots of Connacht where the name is very numerous. In Connemara, the name is usually that of a branch of the O'Fleirty's. The McDonagh sept in county Cork were a branch of the MacCarthys: the name is now rare there and apparently many of these resumed the name MacCarthy.⁴

According to the Primary Valuation Property Survey 1847-64, it is evident that the surname MacDonagh was quite a common name mainly in the West of Ireland in the nineteenth century with the household numbers varying from county to county. The number of MacDonagh households ranged from just one in county Kilikenny to 200 in county Galway. Regarding county Longford, there were just fourteen MacDonagh households recorded in this survey(including name variants). A chart reflecting a full breakdown of these households is available at the end of this report.

Heaney:

The surname Heaney also owns several variations. These are Ó hÉighnigh, Ó h-Éanna, Hegney, Heany, Heeny, Hainy, Hany and Heny.⁵ All records discussed in the following report have been cross-checked with surname variants.

Again, the Surnames of Ireland by Edward MacLysaght has indeed recorded this surname: '(O) **Heaney, Heeney** The principal sept of this name is *Ó hÉighnigh* in Irish, important and widespread in Oriel, formerly stretching its influence into Fermanagh. Another family of the name in Ulster were Erenaghs of Banagher in county Derry.⁶

According to the Primary Valuation Property Survey 1847-64, it is evident that the surname Heaney was quite a common name mainly in the East and North-East of Ireland in the nineteenth century with the household numbers varying from county to county. The number of Heaney households ranged from just one in county Wexford to 125 in county Armagh. Regarding county Longford, there were just five Heaney households recorded in this survey, making our search for your Heaney ancestors much less tedious. A chart reflecting a full breakdown of these households is available at the end of this report.

⁴ Edward MacLysaght, *The Surnames of Ireland*, (Dublin, 1985) p.84.

⁵ [http://www.irishtimes.com/ancestor/surname/index.cfm?fuseaction=Go.&UserID=.](http://www.irishtimes.com/ancestor/surname/index.cfm?fuseaction=Go.&UserID=)

⁶ Edward MacLysaght, *The Surnames of Ireland*, (Dublin, 1985) p.152.

JAMES HEANEY-MCDONAGH:

As outlined in previous correspondence, a birth/baptism record has not been located for James however we are aware that he was born around the year 1825. With this in mind, we have undertaken a search for James' parent's marriage record; this search fortunately resulted in one conclusive record. This record reads as follows:

- ❖ The marriage of Kieran McDonagh and Margaret Heaney took place on 3 April 1824 in the Roman Catholic parish of Shrule. Witnesses present on the day were William Deasy and Catherine Kelly.



Canal at Ballymahon. Image courtesy of www.cartrongarrow.com.

Shrule is the Roman Catholic parish in which the village of Ballymahon is located. It is likely that this wedding was officiated by the local Catholic priest at Margaret's house in Ballymahon as many Roman Catholic Churches were not built until the mid-nineteenth century and even later (upon when it became compulsory for Catholics to

marry in a church). Unfortunately neither of their parents were mentioned

on their marriage document. The only address stated on this record is that of the parish in which they married however this always signifies the bride's parish of origin. It was and, in many places, still is tradition to marry in the bride's parish. From this we can gather that it was James' mother who hailed from Ballymahon. This begs the question as to which parish James' father Kieran came from.

Moving forward to 1831, a death record for Kieran McDonagh has surfaced. The details of this record read as follows:

- ❖ The burial of Kieran McDonagh took place on 20 January 1831 in the Roman Catholic parish of Newtowncashel. His address was recorded as Curnaglove (townland), Newtowncashel, Co. Longford.

Not long after this, the following year, it seems that James' mother Margaret also died. The details of this record read as follows:

- ❖ The burial of Margaret McDonagh took place on 27 June 1832 in the Roman Catholic parish of Shrule. She was aged just 28 at the time and her address was recorded as Ballymahon (village), Shrule, Co. Longford.

Neither of the above burial records explain the cause of death but it is possible, given the year being 1831, that Kieran McDonagh (and subsequently his father James as we will see further on) may have been fatally wounded in the notorious Tithe War of 1831. Furthermore, regarding Margaret, it is likely she died due to the cholera epidemic which hit Ireland's shores in 1832. This epidemic saw the decimation of tens of thousands of people around Ireland with many accounts of cholera deaths in county Longford.⁷ Bearing this in mind, however, their causes of death cannot as yet be confirmed definitively but it is important to explain the times in which they lived and died. As we can see, they were buried in both their respective parishes and so one can only assume that, given their age, they had not yet purchased their own plot and so were buried in each respective family plot.

What is interesting also is a death record which we have come across for a James McDonagh with an address at Curnaglove (townland), Newtowncashel, Co. Longford. His burial took place on 18 February 1831. From this, it is necessary to point out that in Ireland it was customary at this time to call ones first son after his paternal grandfather or likewise their first daughter after her paternal grandmother. With this information in mind and also the low frequency of the surname McDonagh in this parish, it clearly suggests that James' father and grandfather was from the neighbouring parish of Newtowncashel. However, unfortunately baptism records did not stretch back far enough to confirm the above highly plausible hypothesis. Moving forward to 1846, we have also located an indexed death record of that of the widow McDonagh who died at a



A graveyard at Saints Island, Lough Ree, (Newtown)Cashel. Image courtesy of www.loughree.ie.

⁷ 'The Cholera Epidemic in Ireland, 1832-3: Priests, Ministers and Doctors' by Huge Fenning in *The Catholic Historical Society of Ireland*, Vol. 57 (2003).

nearby estate on 17 February. It is likely that the widow McDonagh was left homeless after both heads of family died whereupon she sought employment in a nearby estate. I am unsure however, as to which estate.

What is certain is that, sadly, both James and Margaret McDonagh left behind their very young son James and it is also highly unlikely he had any other siblings. It seems that after the tragedy of the passing of his parents, James was taken in by relatives/neighbours, in this case the Donnell family, and raised as their own. As we can see from subsequent land records, the Donnell's were quite a prominent family in both the parish of Newtowncashel (commonly known as Cashel) and also in the parish of Shrute. Furthermore, it seems that by the mid nineteenth century the Donnell's of Newtowncashel acquired the property of land in Cormaglova (as it is now called) previously held by the McDonagh family. Regarding their relationship, it is highly likely that they were either close relatives, possibly through a paternal or maternal aunt of Francis' who may have married a Donnell man, or it is possible that they were also just close family friends. Finding a familial connection between the Donnell family and the McDonagh's or Heaney's would require more information regarding family members. Because of this, it is difficult to know which parish James was brought up in. However, regarding family information passed down, it is clear the town of Ballymahon seems to hold strong and so it is quite plausible that James grew up closer to his mother's home place.



General Post Office, Dublin.

uncle however it is plausible, as previously mentioned, that they were related or had close family ties. Regarding James' life after Ballymahon, family lore suggests that James took a job in a Post Office in Dublin. Occupational records for those who worked at the Dublin Post Office

As previously stated, it is believed that James was mainly brought up by a Rev. Fr. O'Donnell who ensured he achieved an education and in turn good career prospects. Many prominent families at this time had a priest in the family who raised the social status of their lot and therefore was in a position to help family members out. It is unlikely that Fr. O'Donnell was James'

prior to 1922 (the founding of the Irish Free State) are located at the British Postal Museum & Archive in London and require visitation or one can hire an in-house researcher if visitation is not possible. If you would like me to apply on your behalf, I would be happy to do so as part of the further research process. For more information regarding further research, please visit our website on www.oakancestry.ie.



Delia McLaughlin with her daughter Margaret. Image courtesy of McLaughlin Family Sheet, www.ancestry.com

From Dublin, James enlisted in the British Army and was subsequently stationed at Ayrshire in Scotland. While there, he met a woman by the name of Delia McLaughlin whom he married. They married on 7 May 1855 in Ayrshire, Scotland. Records show that the couple then went on to have two children, a son, John, born 12 Apr 1856 in Edinburgh, Scotland and one daughter Margaret born on 3 July 1858 in Inverness, Scotland. Regarding other children born to James and Delia, it seems that they had at least six more as corresponding records show i.e. immigration records and also both Scotland and U.S census records. Their names were: John; Margaret; Bridget; Susan; Deirdre; Patrick and Kieran.

In fact, there is quite a lot of information regarding their lives in both Scotland and the U.S from other associated family members on www.ancestry.com. One such member is that of Cormac McLaughlin, he offers various hypotheses regarding the Heaney-McDonagh family history alongside family lore passed down through his own family regarding your common ancestor James McDonagh. One such story is that James was an ardent supporter of the Irish Independence movement and is also said to have deserted the British Army, eventually prompting him to immigrate to the U.S. Furthermore, what is interesting to point out is that James and Delia, after their first two children were born, decided to change their surname to Heaney- James' mother's surname. This name change may further signify that James did indeed desert the British Army at this time. Cormac can be contacted through www.ancestry.com via his family group sheet entitled the 'McLaughlin Family Tree'.

Having arrived in New York in the early 1870's, James Heaney-McDonagh and his family eventually settled in Ohio in the Midwest of the U.S where he died in Ross County in 1923. Moving on a little further in time, back in Ireland, we can see a number of Donnell families living at Cormaglova, (Newtown)Cashel and also in Ballymahon in both the 1901 and 1911

Irish national census records. There is also a large Heaney family shown living at Tipper on the outskirts of Ballymahon in both 1901 and 1911 also. This is the only Heaney family living in the vicinity of Ballymahon at this time therefore using the power of deduction; it is likely that this particular Heaney family were indeed related to James Heaney-McDonagh. More information regarding these families and their census records is indeed available on request.



James Heaney-McDonagh. Image courtesy of McLaughlin Family Sheet via www.ancestry.com.

LAND RECORDS:

An initial search was conducted through the Tithe Applotment database (*see 'Information on Irish Genealogical Records' above*-these land documents were recorded in the early 1820's) for county Longford. From this initial search, it has been found that there were fifteen tithe payers by the surname McDonagh (including variants) in county Longford. From here, we took a closer look at the parishes of (Newtown)Cashel and other Shrule parishes. This search yielded three results of which the following details show:

- ❖ James McDonagh paying tithes for over 32 acres of 'good' land in Cormaglove (townland), (Newtown)Cashel, Co.Longford.
- ❖ Brigid McDonagh paying tithes for just over 2 acres of 'good' land in Knightsgrove (townland), (Newtown)Cashel, Co. Longford.
- ❖ Kieran McDonagh paying tithes for over 8 acres of land in Drynan (townland) located in the village of Ballymahon in the parish of Shrule.

The most noticeable record above is that of Kieran McDonagh as he is the only man of this surname holding land in Ballymahon and so the likelihood of Drynan being the home place in which James was born is extreme. To compound this further, it must be noted that in pre-Famine times Irish women, upon proposal of marriage, would be presented by her parents with a dowry (fortune). A dowry usually consisted of either money or property and in the case of James' parents, Kieran and Margaret, it is highly plausible that Kieran accepted this property and moved from (Newtown)Cashel to Ballymahon with his new wife Margaret. These particular land documents were recorded in 1823, just two years before your ancestor James

was born and eight years before Kieran McDonagh died. This year would also indicate that John McDonagh and Mary Hanlon married sometime around (or before) 1823.

Staying with the area of Ballymahon, we then undertook a search for tithe-payers by the name of Heaney of which there were three. However one record does stand out which is that of a Mark Heaney, the following details show:

- ❖ Mark Heaney paying tithes for quite an extensive amount of ‘good’ land in Tipper (townland), Kilcommock (outskirts of Ballymahon). He was also paying tithes for 3 acres of land located in the village of Ballymahon at this time also.

A Timothy Heaney was paying tithes for holding one portion of land in the adjoining townland of Fohey/Foygh and a Edmond Heaney was also paying tithes for holding one portion of land in the adjoining townland of Kiltaffrey.

Regarding Donnell/O'Donnell landholders, what is interesting to point is that the Donnell family were prominent landholders in the parish of (Newtown)Cashel and the O'Donnell family were prominent landholders spread out in the parish of Shrule including the village of Ballymahon. Regarding the Donnell/O'Donnell families in county Longford in general, these records show that they settled mainly in these two parishes of south-west Longford. The letters O being absent or present before the name Donnell is a clear distinction of the two families with respect to their parish of origin. Furthermore, the interesting spelling variations plus the spelling given by the client in her application have further compounded the assumption that it was the O'Donnell family of Shrule who raised James after he was orphaned.

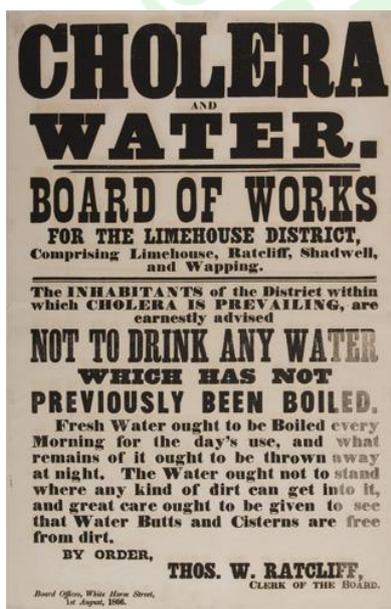
Additionally, as discovered in the Griffiths Valuation (*see 'Information on Irish Genealogical Records' above*) records of the mid nineteenth century, there were around a dozen landholders by the surname McDonagh (including variants) spread around in county Longford at this time. None were found for the parish of (Newtown)Cashel however two landholders of this name were found in the parish of Shrule: Michael McDonagh and John McDonagh. It is uncertain however if these particular men are related to James.

Focusing now on landholders with the surname Heaney, there are five showing for county Longford with two men- a Peter and Kevin Heaney- renting land in Ballybranigan and Tipper townlands respectively, both located in the parish of Shrule. There was also one Sarah Hanlon renting land in Cornagovagh located in the parish (Newtown)Cashel. Looking at the Donnell's of Longford, we can see that there were many more landholders by this surname in county

Longford, around sixty, renting and owning land mainly in the parish of Cashel (formerly Newtowncashel). Regarding the name O'Donnells, there were nearly the same amount of landholders renting and owning land in the parish of Shrule and its surrounding hinterland. Again, the sheer amount of land in each parish held by Donnell's/O'Donnell's demonstrates the families standing and prominence in both parishes.

IRELAND IN THE EARLY 1830's:

The 1830's in Ireland was one of the most tumultuous decades of the century bringing about widespread agrarian unrest and a devastating disease which saw death en masse in many communities, both large and small, around the country. Firstly, the aforementioned agrarian unrest came in the form of what was known as 'The Tithe War'. This particular event in history began due to the tithes or land taxes introduced by the state in the early nineteenth century (mentioned above). In fact, the above stated *Tithe Applotment Books* are records of these paid taxes. These taxes were imposed by the (somewhat) recently established Church of Ireland in the early 1800's. They were introduced to maintain the upkeep of the Protestant Church of Ireland. This enraged many Irish Catholics and Presbyterians as people of the Protestant faith constituted only around 12% of the population at the time. It is little wonder, then, that the Tithe War of the early 1830's was triggered. Starting around late 1830, early 1831 there were reports of protests from all over the country became common place. Often times, these protests were violent resulting in many fatalities, the most of which were recorded in 1831, the year James and Kieran McDonagh died.



Cholera and Water Notice. Image courtesy of www.postersofwar.co.uk.

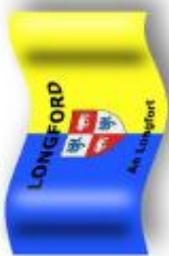
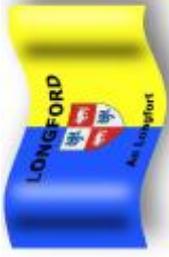
The following year, Cholera, a micro-organism of Asian origin, spread to Ireland. This tiny organism thrived in areas of poor sanitation and thus spread quite rapidly to all corners of Ireland killing up to 50,000 in that year alone. Once infected, one died within twelve hours leaving family members devastated and in many cases, due to its contagion risk, whole families perished. Mass graves became commonplace for many/most communities in Ireland at this time, not least because graveyards were becoming overcrowded but also people were fearful of the high contagion risk making sure such large plots were located far from urban areas. This was indeed a most tragic time for

thousands of Irish families and it is highly plausible that given her young age plus the time in which she lived, Margaret Heaney-McDonagh died of this disease.

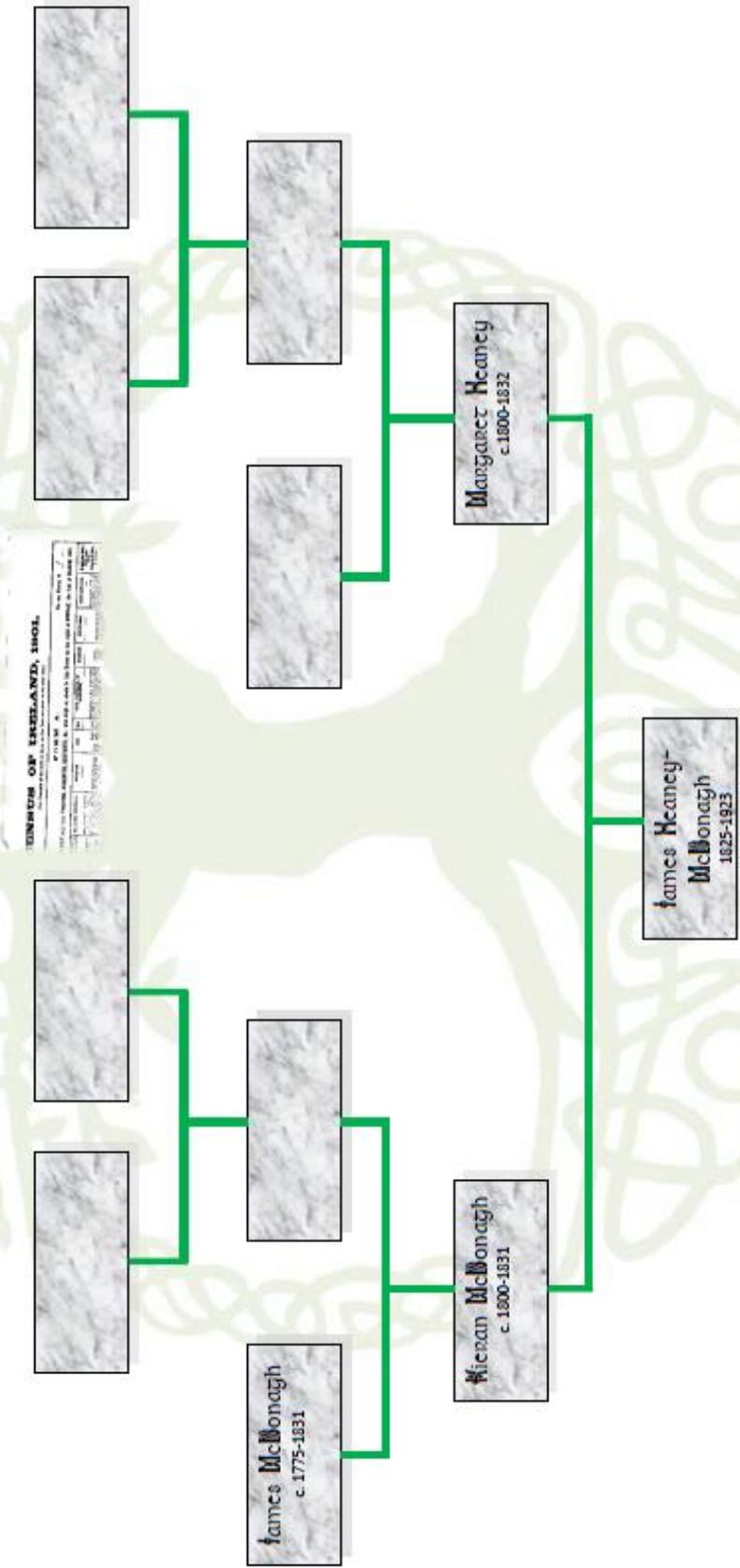
An interesting fact regarding this particular pandemic in Irish history is that it gave rise to what is now known as one of the world's greatest horror stories ever told-Dracula. Dracula's author Bram Stoker, grew up listening to his mother's sobering accounts of the devastation that hit her home town of Sligo when she was a girl in 1832. It has been suggested by, not only scholars but also by his family members, that tales of this brutal and swift disease had influenced him heavily in his writings.



FAMILY TREE:



Heaney-McDonagh Family Tree



RECOMMENDED READING:

- ❖ *The Population of Ireland, 1785-1845* by K.H Connell, 1850.
- ❖ *New Directions in Irish-American History* by Kevin Kenny, 2003.
- ❖ *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest 1780-1914* by Samuel Clarke and James S. Donnelly, 2003.
- ❖ *Medicine, Disease and the State in Ireland 1650-1940* by Greta Jones and Elizabeth Malcolm, 1999.
- ❖ *Longford: Essays in county history* by Raymond Gillespie and Gerard P. Moran, 1991.

RECOMMENDED VISITING:

- ❖ **Lough Ree, Newtowncashel, Co. Longford:** This part of Longford is very special as it boasts picturesque scenery with quite an array of attractions to boot. From the nearby ancient and tranquil Culnagore Wood to the many islands dotted upon the lake, this area is steeped in history and well worth the visit while in county Longford.
- ❖ **Corlea Trackway Visitors Centre, Kenagh, Co. Longford:** Located halfway between the parish of Newtowncashel and the small town of Ballymahon, this ancient bog road (built around 150AD) is the largest of its kind in Europe.
- ❖ **Irish Bog Oak and Bogwood Sculpture, Barley Harbour, Newtowncashel, Co. Longford:** Longford is known for the Corlea track, Europes largest bog road, built over 2000 years ago. Aswell as visiting this spectacular site, it is well worth going to see artists Michael and Kevin Casey's beautiful bogwood creations. These sculptures are made using bogwood preserved in our bogs over the last 5000 years.
- ❖ **National Museum of Country Life, Turlough Park House, Castlebar, Co. Mayo:** State of the art museum containing detailed exhibits and accounts of the history of country life in Ireland. Gives magnificent insight into nineteenth-century Irish country living.



***Please note:** If there are any further records you would like to request from the information provided in this report, please contact Marie at marie@oakancestry.ie. Oak Ancestry is also available for field research and will supply a very competitive quote upon request (discount applies for returning customers).*



Oak Ancestry