

3.19 Argentinean Mealys?

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Anyone who has ever dabbled in genealogy will understand that as a hobby is a bit like soaking up water in a sponge - the sponge just keeps getting heavier. As more facts are uncovered, more becomes unknown. And so I continue to peck away here and there - sometimes making progress and sometimes not. This is how it goes whenever I've tried to locate any siblings of my Great Great Grandfather Laurence Mealy.

The puzzle to be resolved is why we have no factual information regarding any siblings of Laurence Mealy. He obviously knew a great deal about his family because it's there in his notes that were stored away in Violet's biscuit tin. He erected a tombstone in the Templecross burial grounds to record the dates that members of his family were laid to rest. And yet, if he ever left a record of who were his siblings, we don't have it today.

Was Laurence an only child? Maybe so, but I'm going on the assumption that he was not. So here is a summary of where the search for brothers and sisters of Laurence Mealy has come to thus far.

Mealy families in Co. Westmeath

The Mealy surname and variants of the surname appear in several areas of County Westmeath and along the adjacent County Longford border in the mid to late 1800s. Although I have been able to eliminate some of these families, I have not yet been able to make any positive links. The most promising leads are:

- In Griffith's Valuation¹ (1854) John Mealia's² land consisted of a small acreage at Tristernagh and the adjacent Templecross burying ground. A much larger acreage of John's land was located in the nearby townland of Ballynacrogghy (Gallowstown). A Michael Mealy is shown occupying a small parcel of land at Ballynacrogghy while at the same time a Mary Mealy occupied a slightly larger parcel of land at Grange. Grange was relatively close to both Gallowstown and Tristernagh townlands. Note the difference in spelling of the surnames - this is as they were recorded in Griffith's Valuation. These may or may not be entirely different families.

¹ In order to produce the accurate information necessary for local taxation, the Tenement Act of 1842 provided for a uniform valuation of all property in Ireland, to be based on the productive capacity of land and the potential rent of buildings. The man appointed Commissioner of Valuation was Richard Griffith, a Dublin geologist, and the results of his great survey, the Primary Valuation of Ireland, were published between 1848 and 1864. It lists every landholder and every householder in Ireland. Apart from townland, address and householder's name, the particulars given are: name of the person from whom the property was leased (immediate lessor); description of the property; acreage; valuation.

² John Melia was Laurence Mealy's father.

- About two years ago I was contacted by a person in England who has Melia ancestors born on the Kinturk Desmesne, near Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath. Castlepollard is located slightly to the northeast of where John Mealia lived at Tristernagh. The time period is right, and the Christian names in the Castlepollard family are: John, Joseph, Lawrence and Michael. This Melia researcher had located her possible Great Great Grandparents as Thomas Melia and Elizabeth Kennan (still to be proven). I have never been able to positively link to this Melia family.

Mealy families in Argentina

With more and more information coming on-line through the internet, I've periodically plugged in a few names to see what comes up. One night, I was trying to find more information about the Castlepollard families when these two interesting links from Argentina appeared:

- **John Mealy.** *Nació en 1834 en Ballinacarrigy, Co. Westmeath, Irlanda. Censado en 1869 en Carmen de Areco, PBsAs. Falleció el 20.5.1881 en un viaje a Europa. Casado en matrimonio con Therese Leavy, nacida en 1839 en Irlanda, censada en 1895, y que falleciera el 9.8.1912 en Carmen de Areco, PBsAs, hermana de Anne Leavy de Shaughnessy, nacida en 1837 en Balross, Ballinacarrigy, Co. Westmeath, Irlanda, y fallecida el 11.10.1905 en Carmen de Areco, PBsAs.*

Basic translation:

John Mealy. Born in 1834 in Ballinacarrigy, Co. Westmeath, Ireland as per census of 1869 at Carmen de Areco, Argentina. Died on 20.5.1881 on a visit to Europe. Married to **Therese Leavy**, born in 1839 in Ireland, as per census of 1895, and died 9.8.1912 at Carmen de Areco, Argentina, sister of Anne (**nee Leavy**) **Shaughnessy**, born in 1837 in Balross, Ballinacarrigy, Co. Westmeath, Ireland, and died on 11.10.1905 at Carmen de Areco, Argentina.

www.irishgenealogy.com.ar/genealogia/M/Mealy/John.php

- **John Elliff.** *Nació en 1842 en Irlanda. Murió antes de 1895. Casado en matrimonio el 5.6.1860 en Carmen de Areco, PBsAs, con Elizabeth Mealy, nacida en 1842 en Irlanda, censada en 1895 en San Andrés de Giles, PBsAs. www.irishgenealogy.com.ar/genealogia/E/Elliff/john.htm*

Basic translation:

John Elliff. Born in 1842 in Ireland. Died before 1895. Married on 5.6.1860 in Carmen de Areco, Argentina, to **Elizabeth Mealy**, born in 1842 in Ireland as per census of 1895 at San Andrés de Giles, Argentina.

With a little more digging I was into the website of the Society for Irish Latin American Studies (www.irlandeses.org), which provided a wealth of information about County Westmeath emigrants to Argentina, as compiled by Argentinean genealogist Eduardo A. Coghlan in 1987.

Coghlan found that of the 4,348 Irish settlers he had tracked through the 1869 and 1895 Argentinean census records, 59 of these individuals had come to the River Plate area of Argentina from the Co. Westmeath town of Ballinacarrigy - John and Elizabeth Mealy appear to be amongst them.

Christian names used in the Argentinean families descending from John Mealy and Elizabeth Mealy Elliff match up closely with our Irish Mealys: Mary, Ana, Elizabeth, John, Emilia, Julia, Joseph, Tomas, Isabel and Michael. The similarities in naming patterns between the Irish families and the Argentinean families may be coincidental - or not.

And further - there was also a piece of Coghlan's research showing that the son of Elizabeth Mealy Elliff (Tomas Elliff) married in Argentina to Margarita Keena in 1902. Margarita was the daughter of William Keena, who was recorded in the 1895 Argentinean census as William Kenna, born in Ireland.

I'm still looking for positive links between any of the above individuals to our Great Great Grandfather Laurence Mealy. However, there are now even more questions posed, such as:

- Are the Argentinean Keena/Kenna families connected in any way to the pipe makers James and Timothy Kenna?
- Was there any connection between the Mealy and Kenna families whilst in Ireland?

The answers to these questions may never be found, but the genealogical sponge keeps soaking up more and more information - and I still haven't been able to discover if Laurence Mealy had any siblings or not!