



A CHRISTMAS PIG IN TROY

(YOU NEVER KNOW WHERE GENEALOGY RESEARCH LEADS)

A. The following story will give you an indication of how one genealogy research look-up may lead to another find that ultimately will turn up an interesting family story that was unknown to family members. Oh what a tangled web genealogy research can be!

To begin the story I was using the newspaper microfilm for the April 20, 1932 edition of the Troy Record at the Troy Library to find the obituary for John J. Keating (1889-1932) who died on that date. Mr. Keating was the son of Michael H. Keating and Ellen U. Halpin (1864-1938) and he would have been a first cousin-once removed to me. His mother Ellen was a daughter of Bridget McCormick Halpin (1845-1925) who was a sister to my great grandmother Catherine McCormick O'Connor (1850-1923). Both Bridget & Catherine by the way, along with their brother Matthew (185?-1927) were from Dunbin, County Louth, Ireland.

I found the obit for John on page 10 of the Troy Record and it is copied below.

THE TROY RECORD – Wednesday Evening
April 20, 1932 page 10

Obituary.

John J. Keating, life long resident of the Sixth Ward, died this morning at his home 15 Forbes Avenue, after a long illness. He was the son of **Mrs. Ellen Halpin Keating** and the late **Michael H. Keating**, for a number of years alderman from the Sixth Ward. Besides his mother, he is survived by a sister, **Mrs. Peter Manning**, and several aunts and uncles. The funeral will be Saturday at 9 a.m. from St. Michael's Church, where a solemn mass or requiem will be celebrated. Interment will be private in St. Joseph's Cemetery.

B. As usual, whenever I was looking through the old Troy newspapers I would look for the column reporting news items for South Troy or the Southern Wards to see if I had any connections with any of the articles.

To my surprise I found on page 22 of the newspaper, a story about a surprise birthday party given by my mother, Mary Elizabeth O'Connor McGrath (1901-1981) for her sister Agnes O'Connor (1912-2002). This party was long before I was born and was therefore interesting family news to me. That news article is shown below:

THE TROY RECORD – Wednesday Evening
April 20, 1932 page 22

SOUTH END.

Surprise Party

A surprise birthday party was tendered last evening in honor of **Miss Agnes O'Connor** at the home of her sister, **Mrs. James McGrath**,

739 Burden Avenue. The house was attractively decorated in pink and white and a large birthday cake formed a centerpiece. Dinner was served to fifty guests. Piano selections were played by **Mrs. James McGrath** and **Joseph Clancy**. Vocal numbers were sung by **Miss Agnes O'Connor** and **Frank Murray**. Entertainment was also provided by **Mrs. P. J. Elligott** and **Bridie Keveney**. Awards for games were presented by **Macy Healy** and **Mr. Keveney**. **Miss O'Connor** received a beautiful bouquet of pink carnations and other handsome gifts.

Note: The party was **April 19, 1932** and it was **Miss O'Connor's** 20th birthday.

C. My **Aunt Agnes** died on October 12, 2002 and she was buried from the John H. Clinton Funeral Home which is run by my cousin **John Clinton**. John's mother, **Florence O'Connor Clinton** (1916-1998) and my mother were sisters, so John is my first cousin. A copy of her obituary notice is shown below:

THE TIMES UNION – Sunday
October 13, 2002 page E15

O'Connor, Agnes T.

TROY – **Agnes T. O'Connor**, 90, formerly of Burden Avenue, Troy, died Saturday, October 12, 2002 at Van Rensselaer Manor after a long illness. Born in Troy, she was the

daughter of the late **William F. and Mary Carroll O'Connor.**

Miss O, as she was known by her family, was a graduate of St. Michael's School, attended Catholic Central High School and was a graduate of **St. Joseph's Conservatory of Music.** She was employed during World War II at the **Watervliet Arsenal** and later at **Tek Hughes** in Watervliet. In addition to being an accomplished **pianist**, she was a well-known Troy **vocalist.** For many years, she was an **election inspector** in the 6th ward. Her many hobbies included crocheting, crossword puzzles and being an avid NY Yankees fan.

She is survived by her special niece, **Florence A. Welsh**; her children, **Megan and Kylie Welsh**; and; by innumerable other nieces, nephews, grandnieces, grandnephews, great-grandnieces and nephews and cousins. She was the sister of the late **Timothy J. O'Connor, Mary E. McGrath, William F. O'Connor, Jr., Helen G. Renaud and Florence M. Clinton.**

Funeral services will be held Tuesday morning at 8:45 from the John H. Clinton Funeral Home, Washington Park and Third Street, Troy and at 9:30 a.m. at St. Michael the Archangel Church. Calling hours will be held on Monday from 4 to 8 p.m. at the funeral home.

**JOHN H. CLINTON
FUNERAL HOME, INC.**

**256 Washington Street
Troy, NY 12180
(518) 274-1011**

Note: Not mentioned were two other **brothers** who died young, **Joseph O'Connor (1910-1918)** and **Francis O'Connor (1918-1920)**.

Note: Bearers at the funeral were **nephews William O'Connor, William Clinton** and **William McGrath**, **grand nephews Gregory Sekellick** and **John Clinton III** and **Stephen Welsh**, **husband** of **niece Florence Ann Clinton Welsh**.

Note: Burial was in the **O'Connor** family plot in St. Joseph's Cemetery, Troy, NY.

D. As is typical of funerals today there is usually a collection of family photographs on display during the wake. My donation to the display board was the article on the **Surprise Birthday Party**. It was later in the evening when my cousin John Clinton read the Surprise Birthday article and he told me that a woman, Betty Bott, who had just left the wake was the daughter of **Mrs. P. J. Elligott** who was mentioned in the Surprise Birthday article.

I called Betty the next day to tell her about the reference to her mother and she was interested in seeing the article. My letter to Betty sending the article follows:

October 17, 2002

Dear Betty:

Enclosed are the following items which may be of interest to your mother:

1. Story on 20th birthday party for Agnes O'Connor which mentions your mother and your aunt.

2. Wedding write-up on my mother and father.
3. News story on the death of my mother's brother in 1918.

I would be interested in hearing your mother's reactions to these stories especially what she remembers about the birthday party. Also did she know my mother before she was married? What time period did she live with my mother?

You can explain to your mother that I am the eighth of Mame and Jim's children. I am also the second William as my mother's first child died seven days after birth. My birth name was William O'Connor McGrath to distinguish me from the first William McGrath.

Sincerely,

Bill McGrath

E. In response to my letter to Betty I received a wonderful story about my mother and father and Betty's mother as well as the story of the Christmas Pig. Betty's letter follows:

November 3, 2002

Dear Bill:

Sorry for the delay in answering your correspondence. I've been trying to gather information for you.

Sorry, Mom does not remember the birthday party. But she really enjoyed the articles as we all did.

My mom didn't know your mother before marriage. She came to this country when she was only fourteen. Mame took my mom in when her Aunt Kate (who was not very nice, really tough and mean) wouldn't let her go out. Your father Jimmy said "That's enough, you're coming to live with us". He went over and got my mother's belongings and she lived with them, she thinks for about a year or so. My Aunt Mazie came from Ireland and she stayed with your mother also for about 2 months.

Then her cousin found them an apartment on Federal street. They searched all over South Troy and there wasn't a space to be had! Your mother used to tuck my mother into bed at night. She was so very good to her. I'm sure the Good Lord had her in the palm of his hand..

My mother had told me about your brother's death.

She told me a funny story about your grandfather, who lived next door at the time. He acquired a suckling pig and used to keep it in the cellar, feeding it until Christmas when they had a great feast!! No one was to know it was there.

My mom gets the years mixed up, it was so long ago. But the year of the party 1932, she took my older brother Joe, who was five at the time, to Ireland to see his grandparents. I never knew them.

Hope this has been of interest to you as it was to me. Thanks again.

“Happy Holidays” God Bless, Betty Bott

Note: Most people called my mother “Mame” “Jimmy is my father, **James Joseph McGrath** (1900-1974).

Note: My grandfather, who lived next door at 741 Burden Avenue, was **Thomas McGrath** (1863-1949) and my grandmother was **Nora Kennedy McGrath** (1872-1955). Both of them came from Thurles, Tipperary, Ireland.

Note: A little over two months from the date of Betty's letter, her mother, **Elizabeth Elligott** died on January 14, 2003 at the age of 97 years, 21 days.

F. So you can see what a convoluted route genealogy research can lead you on. If I never looked at that 1932 Troy newspaper, and found the item on the Surprise Birthday Party, this story about the Christmas Pig would never have been known. I was very lucky to obtain this story from Mrs. Elligott just two months before her death.

Bill McGrath
Clifton Park, N Y

