

EvereadyEddy

The following information has been contributed by **Charles McGranaghan**, Carson City NV, and transcribed for the web by Ed McGranaghan, Sacramento CA. Comments, Corrections or criticisms can be sent here **Ed McGranaghan** Many thanks to Charles for providing this invaluable research and the bulk of current information regarding the McGranaghan family tree. Thanks again Charles.

Family Notes **[McGranaghan, McGrenaghan, McGranahan]**

The surnames of Irish septs derive from the names of places, the names of Christian Saints, the names of crafts and occupations, and from physical characteristics. Before discussing them as they relate to **Clan MagReannachain**, a listing of family surnames seems appropriate. Since 1990 I have found the following:

Magranaghan, McGranachan, McGranagan, McGranaghan, McGranaghen, McGranaghin, McGranahan, McGranaham, McGranaker, McGranehan, McGranathan, McGranigan, McGranithan, McGrannachan, McGrannagan, McGrannaghan, McGrannaghen, McGrannahan, McGrannathan, McGranegen, McGrinican, McGrannican, McGrannighan, McGrenahan, McGrenaghan, McGreneghan, McGreneghen, McGrenegen, McGrenagen, McGrinnaghan, McGrinnigan, McGrinigan, McGrinihan, McGrinihan, McGranohan, McGranochan.

The surnames listed above come from records found in America, Ireland, Scotland, England, and Australia. Many of the variations may logically be attributed to the Anglicization of local Irish language pronunciations. An examination of the late 19th century census reports for Ireland and Scotland reveals that approximately 5% of clan descendants could read and write. For the 95% who could not read or write, some official scrivener (a writer, a clerk, a priest, a minister) prepared their documents (birth, marriage, death records, wills, testaments, etc.) recording surnames phonetically. This accounts for some of the variation in the clan surnames.

Civil recordation of documents began in America around 1770,

Scotland in 1855 and Ireland in 1864. Prior to those years, the majority of documents were written not by legal professionals but by clergymen. After those years (1770-America, 1855-Scotland, 1864-Ireland) civil clerks in what would eventually become *vital records offices* began to replace the clergymen. However, many Irish families, both Catholic and Protestant, objecting to government intrusion in their personal affairs, refused to record documents in the *vital records offices*. They did, however, continue to record events (christenings, marriages, funerals, first communions, confirmations, etc.) in their parishes. During the *Penal Law Years* (137 years between 1692 and 1829), few Catholic records were kept because Catholics, losing their churches, their priests, and their cemeteries to the Protestant Reformation, had no record keeping system. Research indicates that few Catholic records survived the five generation gap in those 137 years. There are, however, some Protestant records available.

In many *Clan MagReannachain* surname families, several of the spellings referenced above have been used. In my own branch of the clan which began migrating to New Hampshire in the late 1850's, *McGranaghan* was used in the County Donegal in Ireland, *McGranaghan* and *McGranachan* were used in Glasgow, Scotland and *McGranaghan*, *McGrenahan*, and *McGranahan* were used in America. Today, two spellings survive, *McGranaghan* and *McGranahan*.

All descendent clan surnames except those that dropped the *Mc* prefix (*Granahan*, *Granaghan*, *Grenahan*, etc.) have four syllables and use the two distinct suffixes, one with 'gin', 'gen', or 'gan' sound, the other with the 'han', 'hen' or 'than' sound.

1.) **The Prefix: *Mag***, the ancient form of *Mac*, meant ***son of*** or ***of the family of***. Over time, the ***Mag*** in most surnames became ***Mac***, and later, abbreviated, it became ***M'*** and ***Mc***. With our surname, however, the ***Ma*** in ***Mag*** became ***Mc*** and the ***g*** in ***Mag*** became the first letter of our core name. Thus the ***g + reanna***, ***g + ranna***, or ***g + rinna***, became the core names ***Greanna***, ***Granna*** and ***Grinna***. The clan surnames evolved in the Irish from ***MagReannachain*** to ***MaGreannachan***, to ***McGreannachain***.

O' means *daughter of* or *of the family of*, but may also signify **a grandson**. O'Granaghan and O'Granahan appear only in the 16th and 17th century records and only in the County Derry, Northern Ireland.

2.) **The suffix. -achain**, the ending of the name, meant simply a *place, a field, a territory or a fort*. In some Irish dialects the **ch** is pronounced as **gh**. Over the centuries, **achain** came to be pronounced as **aghan, aghane, again, agen, agin, ahan, ahen** and **athan**.

3.) **The Core**. The original core of the name, **reanna**, In the Irish an early form of **ranna** or **rinna**, meant **point of land**.

If *MagReannachain* is a place name, it might reference *the point people*. Late in 1993, I received a letter from Fergus Gillespie, the Deputy Chief Herald, Dublin, Ireland, which stated that the pre-anclicized surname was *MagReannachain* that is meant *son of the sharp-eyed one*. He stated that the *Reann* (rinna) portion of the name may mean *spearhead*.

In my letter to Mr. Gillespie, I had inquired about a coat of arms for the clan. He stated that his office had no official record of a coat of arms for *Clan MagReannachain*, but the descendent surnames may use the coat of arms **of thier home country, Donegal**. Gillespie's letter suggests that the *Clan MagReannachain* may have been named for a physical characteristic, *for being sharp eyed*.

Barney McGranaghan of Bridgetown, County Wexford, Ireland has researched the name and the origin of the clan, and his conclusions are worth noting here. He argues that if *Reannachain* evolved from a point of land, the name would be vastly more popular because there are thousands of points of land along the rugged coasts of Ireland. From Barney's notes:

- 1.) Clan MagReannachain descends directly from the Erainn People, a European Celtic Tribe, which, in 500 BC, invaded Ireland and named it Erie.
- 2.) The Laigin People, another European Celtic Tribe, invaded Ireland at Waterford in 250 BC, pushing the Erainn People to the west and to the north.

- 3.) The Goidel People from the Hibernious Valley in Spain invaded Ireland in 50 BC and sought to possess all of Ireland. The Laigin People, who controlled Leinster, merged with them, creating *the Gaels*, a united warring people.
- 4.) Faced with the reality of possible extinction, the Erainn People, *in 50 BC called the Celtic Tribe*, fortified themselves in northwest Ulster. Their ancient fortress, Fir Bolg, was located at Aileagh in Donegal. The army of *The Gaels* swept north, destroying Fir Bolg and eliminating most of the *Celtic Tribe*. Those who survived the onslaught fled to the wild and craggy reaches of Northern Donegal where they were identified as the ***Mag-Rinn-from-the-fortress or MagReannachain.***

Barney McGranaghan's research indicates that Clan MagReannachain, settling in Ireland 500 years before the birth of Christ, has been there longer than most other clans. According to one Gaelic Dictionary, the word *Erie* means *Reann* or *Rinn*. So ***MagReannachain***, synonymous with ***Erie***, the ancient name of the land itself, has a long history.

From the records I've found, the evolution of the whole surname:

- 1.) MagReannachain (*prior to the 14th century*).
- 2.) Shane McGranaghan (*a prisoner of war, pardoned from prison by Queen Elizabeth I in 1603*).
- 3.) Magranaghane, Mcgranachane, and McGranahan (*1609-1610, names of Donegal prisoners of war pardoned by King James I of England*).
- 4.) McGranaghan, McGrenaghan, O'Granaghan, McGranachan, McGranahan (*Donegal parish records of the late 1600's*).
- 5.) The surnames listed in the first paragraph of this report. They have been collected from records *dating from the early 1700's to the present*. As research advances, we should find more information on the evolution of the various surnames.

Could *Clan MagReannachain* have its own Christian saint? That's

a possibility, and one that deserves more research. Many sources place the origin of the clan at Mevagh, a district on the wild north coast of Donegal. The patron saint of Mevagh is *Saint Ringan*, a name that comes close. Contemporaneous of Saint Patrick, *Saint Ringan* lived in the sixth or seventh century.

In a number of countries in Ireland, especially in the north, a **granaghan** (pronounced *gran-a-han*) means *a place where grain is stored or a granary*. The other name for a place of grain storage is *gran-sha*.

While we're on the subject of Granaghan, at least two of the 69,000 or so townlands (old political subdivisions) in Ireland bare the name *Granaghan*. One is in the County Cavan, and the other is in the County Derry. In a thoughtful response from Willie O'Kane, a local historian in County Derry, I learned that *Granaghan Church* is so called because it's on Granaghan Townland. The actual name of *Granaghan Church* is the *Church of Saint John the Baptist*. It was erected in 1839, replacing an earlier Catholic chapel that dated from the 1770's. O'Kane stated that a *Granaghan* in that part of County Derry means *a small gravelly place*.

In the early 1800's, some MagReannachain descendants migrated from Donegal to Mayo. The descendants of those families dropped the *Mc*, becoming the *Granaghans*, *Granahans*, *Granachans*, *Grenaghans* and *Grenahans* of County Mayo and adjacent counties. Today, there are an estimated sixty families of them there and another three hundred families of them in the United States.

According to Patrick Woulfe's *Sloinnte Gaedheal Is Gall*, (Dublin, 1838), *MagReannachain*, anglicized to MacGranahan in Scotland, is an old Galloway name. Galloway located in the Lowlands, is a region that now comprises two counties, Wigtownshire and Kircudbright, but anciently it was a part of the powerful Strathclyde Kingdom, stalwart enough to keep the English and Scots at bay for centuries. The interesting thing about Woulfe's notation is that **MagReannachain** is listed as an **Irish** name. From the introduction to Kevin O'Sullivan's *The McGrenaghans of Gortnatraw, County Donegal* (London, 1985): "*Mag*

Reanachain - an old Donegal name. According to the leading experts on Irish surnames, the 'Reannachain' part is derived from the Irish for 'sharp-pointed', whilst the 'Mag' part means 'son of'. When transcribed into English, the name acquires an enormous variety of spellings, most commonly McGrenaghan and McGranaghan...as far as Irish clans are concerned, the McGrenaghans are a very small one. Consequently, very little research appears to have been carried out on them."

A generation ago, in 1976, I visited Hugh and Catherine McGranaghan, a very kind couple who managed a pub in the village of Raphoe, County Donegal. Hugh explained to me that the tradition in his family was that the McGranaghans had come from Scotland four or five hundred years before.

Historic facts about the clan are scarce, but the following information is available. (Note the variation in the surnames)

The Hearth Money Rolls of 1665 list the following County Donegal taxpayers:

- Donnell M'Granaghan of Stranadorragh, Inniskeel Parish
- Shan Moder M'Granaghan of Dirrish, Killibegs Parish
- Edmond O'Granaghan of Ballywool, Killonard Parish
- Phelomy McGranaghan of Balleighan, Culdaff Parish
- Patrick McGreenaghan of Carrywkenan, Tullabegly Parish
- Patrick O'Granaghan, Parish of Leck, Raphoe
- Bryan McGranaghan (*probably a McGrenaghan of Fanad*)

The Thomas Grove Charity Fund, Letterkenny, County Donegal show the following as receiving Protestant financial support:

- Mary McGranaghan, 1717
- Ann McGranaghan, 1735
- William McGranaghan, 1736
- Hugh McGranaghan, 1740
- Elia McGranaghan, 1748

There's an *Irish Education* record for 1826 which refers to William McGranahan as one who ran a Protestant School with 25 pupils at Aughalatty in Mevagh, County Donegal. There's also a reference to a Mr. McGranaghan (no name given) who ran a school near Milford, County Donegal, around 1760, and a

reference to a Benson McGranaghan who ran a distinguished Protestant School in Stranorlar, County Donegal, in the 1820's. According to clan descendants who settled in the greater Glasgow, Scotland (the Shires of Lanark and Renfrew), the McGranaghans, McGrenaghans, McGranachans, McGranahans, and several other spellings of the name, migrated there from the Countries of Ulster (Donegal, Tyrone and Derry). Glasgow, even three hundred years ago, was a large industrial city where work was readily available. It attracted men and women from all over Scotland, northern England and northern Ireland. Glasgow today is still the largest industrial city in Great Britain.

According to one study, done in 1850, of the seventy-five McGranaghan families in Ulster, fifty were in County Donegal, fifteen were in County Derry and County Tyrone, and the rest distributed through three other Ulster counties. In the same year, there were thirty McGranaghan (various spellings) living in the greater Glasgow area.

In the process of doing the research, I am corresponding with Clan MagReannachain descendants all over the world in an attempt to structure a comprehensive genealogy. From the data already gathered, I'd estimate that there are more people with clan surnames in America as there are in Ireland, Scotland and England combined. In all, there are an estimated 1500 clan surname families in the world today, and an estimated 900 clan surname families in America.

The first *McGranaghan* of record (so far) is Shane McGranaghan (McGrenaghan in some records) of Donegal. He served as an Irish military officer in the Battle of Kinsale (1601) and was subsequently imprisoned by the English. He was pardoned by Queen Elizabeth I in 1603, and he may have settled in Derry, or fled, with other Irish Earls, to France or Spain.

The first *McGranaghan* genealogies of record (all in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, and all Church of Ireland):

- Hugh McGranaghan [c1630-c1690]
- sp: Mary O'Larky (O'Lafferty) [c1635?-c1695] *Married in November, 1654*
 - James McGranaghan [08/16/1655-c1715]

- Donnell McGranaghan [02/28/1660-c1720]
- Neale McGranaghan [c1630-c1690]
- sp: {?} [-]*
 - James McGranaghan [11/29/1657-c1720]
 - Owen McGranaghan [12/02/1658-c1721]

** Prior to 1800, most birth records in Ireland did not include the name of the mother. Mary O'Larky's name comes from a marriage record.*

The first *McGranaghan* of record (so far) in America is John McGranahan, who immigrated with his two brothers, James and David, from Belfast, Northern Ireland, to Donegal Township, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania around 1760. Three families evolved from them. While we have much information on John's descendants, we have little information about the descendants of James and David.

John McGranahan [1752-1830] married *Nellie Smith* [1761-1850] in Donegal Township, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania in 1777. Eventually they settled on the Little Shenango River in Crawford County, in mountainous northwestern Pennsylvania. They had twelve children, some born in Cumberland County, some born in Westmoreland County. *John McGranahan* [1752-1830], renowned as a hunter and trapper, fought for the American Army (Pennsylvania Militia) during the Revolutionary War. His son *John McGranahan* [1778-1869] fought three tours of duty with the Pennsylvania Militia in the War of 1812. He was wounded in action.

Other McGranahan families lived in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in the early 1800's and there are records for Ohio, Virginia, Indiana and Kentucky that indicate the presence of McGranahan families in the early 1800's. Seafaring McGranahan families settled in Nova Scotia in the early 1800's. The first McGranahan of record in California was George D. McGranahan (*George B. McGranahan* in one record) who's listed in the Census of 1850 as residing in Weaverville, El Dorado County. Today, Weaverville is located in Trinity County.

It is difficult to say when the first *McGranaghans* came to America

because of incomplete research, but the first families came in the late 1700's. John McGranaghan (Lancaster, Pennsylvania) appears in the Census of 1820, and Eliza McGranaghan took up residence in Charleston, South Carolina in 1821. James P. McGranaghan married Cynthia Brown in Tazewell County, Virginia in 1826. Hopefully, the research will uncover more. By 1830, the following were in evidence: The James W.

McGranaghan and Richard McGranaghan families in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania area; by 1851, the William and Ann McGranaghan family in Hancock, New York area; by 1850, the Charles McGranaghan family in Boston; by 1853, the William Henry McGranaghan family in Mason County, Kentucky.

From family tradition we know that James W. McGranaghan's father was related to Patrick Henry [1736-1799], the American patriot who lived in Virginia, and there are records indicating that two McGranaghan descendants married two Henry descendants in Ohio in the mid 1800's.

There's city directory evidence of the presence of two McGranaghan families (Hugh & Joseph) in San Francisco in the 1870's, but the first, John McGranaghan, a seaman, arrived there from New York in 1851. There is a record indicating that a Michael McGranaghan was on the staff at Saint Mary's hospital in San Francisco in the mid 1870's.

There were two McGranaghan families in Saint Louis around 1850, one, the Barry McGranaghan family that migrated west from Virginia, and another, one founded by Daniel McGranaghan (*McGranahan* in some records, *McGrinigan* in other records) who immigrated from Ireland to Philadelphia in 1843, headed west, first to Ohio, and eventually to Missouri.

The first McGrenaghan of record is Michael McGrenaghan who arrived in Philadelphia in 1846. There is some evidence that the McGrenaghans who originally settled in Pennsylvania are also the McGranahans who eventually settled in California and subsequently in Washington State.

I have checked the American national telephone directory for clan surname listings. Roughly 70% of them are McGranahan listings, roughly 25% are McGranaghan listings, and 5% are listings with

variant surname spellings. According to what I've read, 80% of telephones are listed and 20% are unlisted. On examining the social security records, it appears that of the death benefits paid to clan surnames in America, 73% have been paid to McGranahan survivors, 23% to McGranaghan survivors and 4% to variant surname survivors. Nothing conclusive, of course, but it indicates that McGranahan is the most popular *Clan MagReannachain* surname in America, that McGranaghan is the second most popular clan surname in America.

Charles L. McGranaghan

Carson City, Nevada

[Return](#)