

## A SMALL WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY: THE NORRIS FAMILY RETURNS TO TAMLAGHTMORE, CO. TYRONE, IRELAND

*Sharon DeBartolo Carmack*

Most never returned. When they left Ireland and headed for America's shores, they were given an "American wake." It was as if those leaving were dying. Family members knew they would never see their loved ones again. At least, this was the case for most Irish immigrants. Although they may have longed to see the emerald shores of their homeland again, the transatlantic voyage was too costly to return. Unlike Italians or Greeks who were "birds of passage," few Irish returned home. Some did go back, however, and while they were there, they might have even created records.

David and Delia (Gordon) Norris were Irish immigrants who had settled in Greenwich, Connecticut. By all appearances in American records, you would never suspect they had left. They were enumerated on the 1900 Federal census for Greenwich, taken on 6 June of that year.<sup>[1]</sup> The next American record of them, on 21 November 1901, was when David and Delia Norris of Greenwich, purchased for \$1 "and other good and valuable considerations" from Fannie B. Grigg of Greenwich, a parcel of land in that town.<sup>[2]</sup> Yet, between 6 June 1900 and 21 November 1901, David, Delia, and their seven children were not in America. They were back in Ireland creating records.

David had originally immigrated to America about 1878, as indicated in the 1900 census.<sup>[3]</sup> The youngest son of John and Nancy (Booth) Norris, David was born 8 June 1860 in the townland of Tamlaghtmore, Co. Tyrone, Ireland, and baptized on 4 July 1861 in Albany Presbyterian Church, Co. Tyrone.<sup>[4]</sup> Based on the 1900 census, David married about 1886, probably in America, Bridget/Delia Gordon, who was born in the townland of Ardvarney, parish of Cloonclare, Co. Leitrim, Ireland, and baptized in the Catholic church there on 29 April 1859. She immigrated to America, likely with her twin sister Mary Gordon, in 1885.<sup>[5]</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1900 U.S. Census, Greenwich, Fairfield Co., Connecticut, ED 72, Sheet 23A, #391-457.

<sup>2</sup> Greenwich, Connecticut, Deeds, 84:462 [FHL 1,434,435].

<sup>3</sup> David has not been located on the 1880 census. He might be the David Norris who arrived at the Port of New York on 17 May 1882, however, on the *Furnessia*, which departed from Glasgow, Scotland, and then Moville, Ireland. This David was from Ireland, age 22, giving him an approximate birth year of 1860. The port of Moville certainly would have been one of the closest ports to David's townland (NARA Microcopy M237, roll 452, list 630, viewed on *Ancestry.com*).

<sup>4</sup> Birth and baptism information were abstracted by Mr. Kee, an elder in the Presbyterian Church in Cookstown, Co. Tyrone, Ireland, from the original baptismal register for the Albany Congregation.

<sup>5</sup> Sharon DeBartolo Carmack, "Going Through the Side Door: The Irish Origins of Delia (Gordon) Norris of Greenwich, Connecticut," *Register* 157 (2003):124-26.

Between 1887 and 1896, David and Delia had seven children: six girls and a boy, all born in Greenwich, Connecticut.<sup>[6]</sup> Four years later, they next appear on the 1900 census for Greenwich, and then in the land records there in 1901. Most researchers would be content with this relatively narrow chronology of events—I certainly was—as rarely can we account for an ancestor during every year of their lives. Yet a family story that made no sense at the time eventually prompted a search for records during that eighteen-month period between the summer of 1900 and the fall of 1901.

David and Delia were my mother's grandparents. Their last-born child, Rose, was her mother. Every time I interviewed my mother, she insisted that her mother, Rose, was born in Ireland. The family story she remembered was that Rose had contracted scarlet fever on board the ship to America. This was not possible; I had Rose's birth certificate from Greenwich.<sup>[7]</sup> There was no question in my mind: she was born in America. Even though we are taught that there is usually a grain of truth in every family story, I shrugged this one off as the exception to the rule—until many years later when I interviewed my mother's older sister. She told me that the family had gone back to Ireland after Rose was born, and on the return trip, Rose had scarlet fever.

Sure enough, there was the whole family, returning from the port of Queenstown (now Cobh) on 31 October 1901 (the day after Rose turned five), on the *Oceanic*, arriving at the port of New York on 6 November 1901.<sup>[8]</sup> Why had the whole family gone back to Ireland? Although this was the age of steamship travel, it was not the age of family vacations abroad, especially for a family of nine whose primary breadwinner was a day laborer. The answers, of course, lay in Ireland.

No doubt their decision to return was prompted by the death of David's father, John Norris, in 1898, followed soon by the death of David's brother, John Jr., in August 1900.<sup>[9]</sup> By November 1900, David, Delia, and their family were back in Ireland.<sup>[10]</sup> David, as the youngest male in the Norris family, was likely the third member listed on the lease for the property in Tamlaghtmore. In a "lease of lives," a common agreement between tenant and landholder in Ireland, a tenant kept the lease as long as one of the three people named on it was still alive. Typically a father included on the lease his youngest son, as presumably that son would outlive him and the other named person. Because the whole family went with

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<sup>6</sup> Sharon DeBartolo Carmack, *My Wild Irish Rose: The Life of Rose (Norris) (O'Connor) Fitzhugh and her mother Delia (Gordon) Norris* (Boston: Newbury Street Press, 2001), 61-69.

<sup>7</sup> Birth record for Rose Norris, 30 October 1896, Town of Greenwich, Connecticut.

<sup>8</sup> Passenger arrival list for the Norris family on the *Oceanic*, leaving the Port of Queenstown, 31 October 1901, arriving at the Port of New York, 6 November 1901 [FHL 1,403,984; NARA T715, vol. 381, roll 234 [3d page of passengers].

<sup>9</sup> Death registers, 1898 (John Norris Sr.) and 1900 (John Norris Jr.), District of Stewartstown, Union of Cookstown, Co. Tyrone; General Register Office, Joyce House, 8-11 Lombard Street East, Dublin 2, Ireland.

<sup>10</sup> Based on the enrollment of their children in school there (see next note).

David to Ireland, and his children were immediately enrolled in school, perhaps David had intended to reestablish his roots in Tamlaghtmore.

Although no U.S. outbound passenger list is available, the family had returned to Ireland after they were enumerated on the 1900 U.S. census on 6 June 1900 and by 6 November 1900, when two of their daughters were admitted to the Ballymaguire National School in the Parish of Ardboe, Co. Tyrone. The school registers for female students listed the name of each pupil, her age, her birth date, and when she was admitted: Nellie Norris, age 11, born 18 March 1889 [*sic*—1890], and Katherine Frances Norris, age 6, born 19 June 1896 [*sic*—1893] were admitted 6 November 1900; Mary Anne Norris, age 13, born 1 July 1887, was enrolled on 7 November 1900; Margaret Elizabeth Norris, age 12, born 28 October 1888, enrolled on 4 December 1900; and “Jeanie” [Jane] Norris, age five [no birth date given], enrolled on 12 August 1901. All were recorded as Presbyterians residing in Tamlaghtmore, and their parents were farmers.<sup>[11]</sup> Unfortunately, the registers did not list parents’ names, but except for the birth years of Nellie and Katherine, all the other information remarkably matches their Greenwich, Connecticut, birth records.<sup>[12]</sup>

While the Norrises were in Ireland, they were also enumerated in the census there on 12 April 1901, although the census day was 31 March. They were living in Co. Tyrone, the townland of Tamlaghtmore, Barony of Dungannon, Parish of Ardboe, Poor Law Union of Cookstown.<sup>[13]</sup> The household consisted of David Norris, head of family, Presbyterian, could read and write, age 41, farmer, married, born Co. Tyrone; “Dalia” G. Norris, wife, Roman Catholic, could read and write, age 42, no occupation, married, born Co. Leitrim; and their unmarried children, all Roman Catholic and born in America: Mary Ann Norris, daughter, could read and write, age 14, scholar; Marg<sup>t</sup> E. Norris, daughter, could read and write age 13, scholar; Ellen Norris, daughter, could read and write, age 12, scholar; John George Norris, son, could read and write, age 10, scholar; Catherine F. Norris, daughter, could read only, age 8, scholar; Jane Norris, daughter, cannot read, age 7; Rose Norris, daughter, could not read, age 5.

The family lived in a private dwelling with ten buildings on the property: a stable, a cow house, a calf house, two piggeries, a fowl house, a barn, a turf house, a potato house, and a shed. The house they lived in had walls of stone, brick, or concrete with a thatched or wood roof. It contained three rooms with five windows in the front of the house and was considered a second class house.<sup>[14]</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 1900 U.S. Census, Greenwich [note 1]; School Registers, Female Students, 1868–1929, Ballymaguire National School, Parish of Ardboe, Co. Tyrone, SCH/944/1/1, Public Records Office of Northern Ireland [PRONI], Belfast. Unfortunately, the only available register for male students covered 1915–1930, beyond the time when the Norrises were there.

<sup>12</sup> Carmack, *My Wild Irish Rose* [note 6], 61–67.

<sup>13</sup> 1901 Ireland Census, Co. Tyrone, Townland of Tamlaghtmore, Barony of Dungannon, Parish of Arboe, Poor Law Union of Cookstown, Form B13 [FHL 0,855,982].

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

“The criteria used to classify housing were the quality of building materials, the number of rooms and the presence of windows.”<sup>[15]</sup>

David was also recorded in the Valuation Revision Book (also known as Cancelled Books) for the townland. His father, John Norris, had been listed as the occupier of Lots 1Aa, B, and C, with Rev. W. Chiehester O’ Neill as the immediate lessor or landlord in Griffith’s Primary Valuation. The property consisted of houses, offices, and land. Lot 1Aa consisted of a little more than seven acres, property B a little more than nine acres, and property C a little more than nine acres.<sup>[16]</sup> John Norris Jr. was added to his father’s listing in 1894. John Norris Sr. and John Norris Jr. continued to occupy lots 1Aa, B, C until 1899. When John Sr. died in 1898, the occupier became John Jr. in 1899. After John Jr.’s death in 1900, his brother, David, was listed in 1902 as the occupier. But after David died in 1902 (see below), John Kennedy became the occupier in 1903.<sup>[17]</sup>

For reasons not known today, the Norrises decided to go back to Greenwich after being in Ireland for such a short period. Within nine months of their arrival back in America, David died at age 42 on 22 August 1902 from heart disease, the same cause of death as his father and brother. He died intestate, and Delia was appointed the administratrix.<sup>[18]</sup>

The return to Ireland was a small window of opportunity, but it was enough time for David and his family to create another passenger arrival record, plus census, school, and valuation records in Ireland, broadening what was known about the family history.

Perhaps your Irish ancestors were among the few who also returned to Ireland. It certainly is worth checking additional passenger arrival list indexes for not just their first arrival to America, but maybe a second time as well.

*Sharon DeBartolo Carmack, CG, of Simla, Colorado, holds a Diploma in Irish Studies from the National University of Ireland, Galway. She specializes in Irish and Irish-American research, as well as writing family history narratives, and is the author of numerous books and articles. She can be reached through her website site at [www.SharonCarmack.com](http://www.SharonCarmack.com).*

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<sup>15</sup> E. Margaret Crawford, *Counting the People: A Survey of the Irish Censuses, 1813–1911* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 49.

<sup>16</sup> Griffith’s Valuation, 1859, p. 15 [FHL 0,258,755]; Revision Book, Townland of Tamlaghtmore, Co. Tyrone, VAL/12B/37/10B, PRONI.

<sup>17</sup> Revision Book, Townland of Tamlaghtmore, Co. Tyrone, VAL/12B/37/10F, PRONI.

<sup>18</sup> Death certificate, Town Clerk’s Office, Greenwich, Connecticut; Greenwich Probate District Records and Inventories 28:622–23 [FHL 1,434,415].