

**Going Through the Side Door:  
The Irish Origins of Delia (Gordon) Norris of Greenwich, Connecticut**  
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Published in *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 157 (April 2003): 125-26.

Finding origins in Ireland can be as easy as finding a tombstone inscribed with the ancestor's townland and county; or it can be as difficult as attempting to change a flat tire without a jack. The latter was the case with Delia (Gordon) Norris, who immigrated to Greenwich, Connecticut, about 1885.<sup>2</sup>

None of the records for Delia, who was born probably 29 April 1860 in Ireland, her husband David Norris, or her seven children gave any clues as to where in Ireland she came from.<sup>3</sup> Focusing research instead on Delia's only known relative in America, her twin sister, Mary (Gordon) Clark, the hope was that she generated a record that gave her origins, and in turn, Delia's.

All that was known about Mary when research began on her was her death year from her tombstone, that she died likely in Greenwich where she was buried, and that she married a man named Clark. But that was enough to get started. The side door opened wide on Mary.

A probate record for her gave a detailed inventory of her household belongings; the births of her two sons and the death of one of them was recorded in Greenwich vital records; a probate record was also uncovered on her husband, along with guardianship papers for her twelve-year-old son when he was left an orphan after both his parents died; and finally a death certificate was located for Mary, but not in Greenwich—in the neighboring village of Port Chester, New York.<sup>4</sup> Although the records were abundant, unfortunately, none listed anything more than "Ireland" as a place of birth for her.

But there was something unusual in Mary's death certificate. It reported Mary's cause of death on 28 April 1908 as "burns of scalp, neck, and shoulders, lacerations of abdomen."<sup>5</sup> Surely such an unusual death warranted space in the local newspaper. Indeed, there was a front-page article, graphically describing Mary's attempted suicide. The article also reported that at the time, Mary was living with her sister on North Main Street in Port Chester, New York.<sup>6</sup> Another sister? The only sister I knew about was Delia, and she lived her whole life in America in Greenwich, Connecticut. There was another sister out there.

When Mary died as a widow in 1908, she left behind a twelve-year-old son, James Clark. His last known whereabouts were in June 1914 in Greenwich, where he was assigned a guardian

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<sup>1</sup> The author wishes thank Anita A. Lustenberger, CG, Kathy Fox, and Roger D. Joslyn, CG, FASG, for their assistance in obtaining records.

<sup>2</sup> 1900 federal census, Connecticut, Fairfield Co., Greenwich, ED 72, Sheet 23A, #391-457; 1920 federal census, Connecticut, Fairfield Co., Greenwich, ED 118, Sheet 22, #366-452. The 1900 census records Delia as arriving in 1885; in 1920 she was reported as arriving in 1886.

<sup>3</sup> For more information and details on records searched, see 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).

<sup>4</sup> All of these records are cited and detailed in Carmack's *My Wild Irish Rose*.

<sup>5</sup> Death certificate #19506, State of New York, Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Records, Albany, N.Y.

<sup>6</sup> "Woman Stabs Herself with Table Knife," *Port Chester Journal*, 23 April 1908, page 1, col. 7.

after his mother died, but no final distribution of his parents' estates was recorded when James would have turned twenty-one in 1917.<sup>7</sup> No record indicated that he went to live with his Aunt Delia. Could he be with the unknown sister in Port Chester? Sure enough, in 1920, living on North Main Street in Port Chester was James Clark, age 23, in the household of Richard E. Hanly [*sic*] and his wife Annie. James's relationship was "nephew."<sup>8</sup>

Another side door had just opened. Richard and Annie Hanly/Hanley were on the 1925 New York state census, where Richard, born in Ireland, was reported as becoming naturalized in 1917 in White Plains, New York, and his wife, Annie, also born in Ireland, had become a citizen when he did.<sup>9</sup> Richard's naturalization papers gave Annie's birth as 22 May 1878 in County Leitrim, Ireland.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the birth record of one of their daughters gave Annie's maiden name, Gordon, and agreed that Annie's place of birth was County Leitrim.<sup>11</sup> Almost certainly, this is where twins Mary and Delia Gordon were born, too.

Additional records on Annie and her family gave no further information about her origins, but her obituary reported her parents' names: Dennis and Margaret (McLaughlin) Gordon.<sup>12</sup> In consulting with Irish research specialist Dwight Radford, co-author of *A Genealogist's Guide to Discovering Your Irish Ancestors*, he thought there was enough information to contact the Leitrim Genealogy Center in Ballinamore and have them check the indexes of the Catholic baptismal records. Within weeks, I had the exact townland for Delia, Mary, Annie, and their nine siblings, including parents' vital information. The Gordon family lived in the townland of Ardvarney, parish of Cloonclare, Co. Leitrim.

If my research efforts had stayed focused on Delia, I might have never learned from where in Ireland she came. Going in through several side doors, however, and researching her siblings proved to be the key to discovering Delia's origins.

### Genealogical Summary<sup>13</sup>

Denis Gordon was born about 1832 (based on his age at death), Co. Leitrim, Ireland, and died 5 August 1892, aged 60 years, in Ardvarney, Co. Leitrim, Ireland. He married 16 August 1858 in the parish of Cloonclare, Co. Leitrim, Margaret McLoughlin, who was born about 1837 (based on her age at death), Co. Leitrim, Ireland, and died 3 December 1895, aged 58 years, in Ardvarney.

Children, all born and baptized in the parish of Cloonclare, Co. Leitrim, Ireland:

- i. Bridget (a.k.a. "Delia"), bpt. 29 April 1859 (twin). Immigrated to America.

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<sup>7</sup> Greenwich, Conn., Probate District Records 32:585, FHL #1434416; 46-645-46, FHL #1434418.

<sup>8</sup> 1920 federal census, New York, Westchester Co., Village of Port Chester, ED 175, Sheet 1A, #6-11.

<sup>9</sup> 1925 New York state census, Westchester Co., Rye, Village of Port Chester, AD 2, ED 9, p. 2, FHL #589904.

<sup>10</sup> Declaration of Intention and Petition for Naturalization, A-0019(32)S(Z3), Westchester County Records Center and Archives, 2199 Saw Mill River Rd., Elmsford, NY.

<sup>11</sup> Birth record of Mary Handley [*sic*], 24 June 1899, Town of Greenwich, Conn.

<sup>12</sup> Obituary of Mrs. Richard E. Hanley, *The Daily Item*, Port Chester, N.Y., 6 May 1954, p. 20, col. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Information provided by the Leitrim Genealogy Centre, Ballinamore, Co. Leitrim, Ireland. The baptisms are indexed and computerized, so no doubt transcription errors appear. Likewise, this author received only a transcript of birth and death records, so cannot be certain what the original records reported.

- ii. Mary, bpt. 29 April 1859 (twin). Immigrated to America.
- iii. Francis, bpt. 22 July 1862.
- iv. James, b. 13 May 1864; bpt. 13 May 1864; d. 17 March 1879, aged 15 years, Ardvarney.
- v. Honor, b. 25 May 1866; bpt. 25 May 1866
- vi. Catherine, b. 25 February 1868; bpt. 25 February 1868.
- vii. John, b. 25 May 1869; bpt. 2 [sic] May 1869.
- viii. Denis, b. 11 February 1871; bpt. 14 February 1871.
- ix. Bartley, b. 16 October 1872; bpt. 19 October 1872.
- x. Rose Anne, b. 28 April 1875; bpt. 2 [sic] April 1875. Immigrated to America.
- xi. Charles, b. 2 March 1877 bpt. 19 February [sic] 1877.
- xii. Margaret, b. 20 May 1880; bpt. 7 [sic] May 1880; d. 16 August 1879, aged 17 [sic], Ardvarney.