

The Obama Trail

Moneygall, County Offaly

While much attention has been placed on President Barack Obama's African ancestry, he also claims family ties to Ireland. Through the lineage of his mother Ann Dunham, Obama's family history can be traced back to 18th Century Ireland and the Kearney family of County Offaly, then Kings County.

One part of the family had relocated to Dublin and prospered in the wig industry. Meanwhile, the family members in Offaly had been successful enough to purchase property rights in Moneygall and Shinrone around 1800.

By the time wigs fell out of fashion, the Dublin Kearney's had already taken on other established professions. The most notable Kearney of this time served as provost of Trinity College and went on to become Bishop of Ossory. Meanwhile in Moneygall, Obama's 5th great-grandfather (for non-genealogists, that's great-great-great-great-great-grandfather) William Kearney (1762-1828) and his son Joseph (c. 1794-1861) worked as rural shoemakers.

An Unexpected Connection

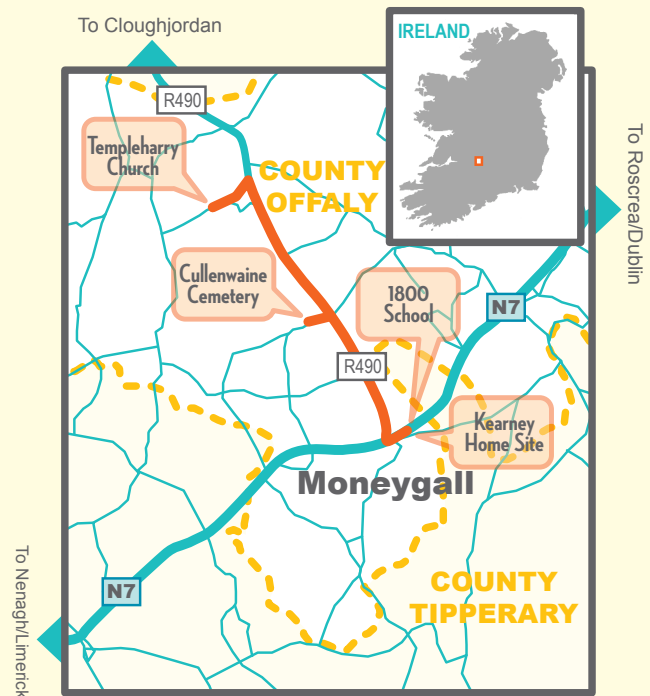
Joseph married Phoebe Donovan around 1825, and they had at least four children. During the 1840s, an unexpected



inheritance helped Joseph and his family escape the ravages of the Irish Famine. Joseph's younger brother Francis had immigrated to the United States and upon his death left a tract of land to his older brother "if he comes to this country." The last will and testament had been filed only a week before Francis' death.

The Kearneys were not able to make the journey together. To pay for his transport, it is likely Joseph sold his property rights in Offaly and sailed from Liverpool to New York City on April 25, 1849. A year later, he sent for his oldest son, Falmouth, who was about 20 years old, his daughter Margaret, and Margaret's husband. And finally, Phoebe and children William and Mary (Anne) booked passage on August 28, 1851.

Two years later, Falmouth married Charlotte Holloway, and U.S.



Census records show that by 1860 the couple had several children and lived in Deerfield, Ohio. In 1870 they were farming in Tipton County, Indiana.

Charlotte and Falmouth died in 1877 and 1878. They were parents to six daughters and three sons. Their daughter, Mary Ann, went on to become the great-great grandmother of the 44th president.

Sites that Remain

Several sites connected to the Kearney's remain in Moneygall. The site of the **Kearney home** is

located on the main street in town and a plaque commemorating Obama appears nearby. A few houses away and across the street, the **1800 School House** likely served as a school for the Kearney children and could have been the family church.

Outside of town, the **Church of Ireland at Templeharry** was likely the family's main church. It is believed the Kearney's would have been buried in **Cullenwaine Cemetery**, but no visible headstones remain. Archaeological research could uncover stones buried beneath the surface.



Kearney House Site



1800 School House



Templeharry Church



Cullenwaine Cemetery

Sources: Offaly County Council, Shannon Development, Canon Stephen Neill and www.honoringourancestors.com/barack-obama.html

U.S. Presidents with Irish Roots

Over half the presidents in U.S. history claim Irish ancestry of some kind. Here is a look at a few...



Andrew Jackson
7th President 1829-37

Jackson's parents left Boneybefore, near Carrickfergus in County Antrim. The village Heritage Centre pays homage to 'Old Hickory.'



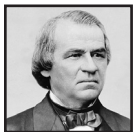
James Knox Polk
11th President, 1845-49

Polk's ancestors emigrated from Coleraine, County Londonderry, in the first wave of Ulster-Scots settlers. (Another source says Donegal)



James Buchanan
15th President, 1857-61

Buchanan's ancestors came from County Donegal and County Tyrone. The Buchanan ancestral home still stands in Deroran, near Omagh.



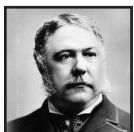
Andrew Johnson
17th President, 1865-69

Johnson's grandfather left Mounthill, near Larne in County Antrim.



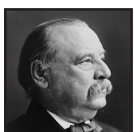
Ulysses S. Grant
18th President, 1869-77

Grant's maternal great-grandfather was from County Tyrone. He visited his ancestral homeland in 1878.



Chester A. Arthur
21st President, 1881-85

Arthur's family hails from Dreen, near Cullybackey, County Antrim. The Arthur Ancestral Home presents his life and times.



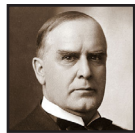
Grover Cleveland
22nd & 24th President,
1885-89 and 1893-97

Cleveland's maternal grandfather Abner Neal emigrated from County Antrim in the 1790s.



Benjamin Harrison
23rd President, 1889-93

Harrison's mother, Elizabeth Irwin, had Ulster-Scots roots through her two great-grandfathers, James Irwin and William McDowell.



William McKinley
25th President, 1897-1901

McKinley's family roots go back to County Antrim. He addressed one of the national Scotch-Irish congresses held in the late 19th century.



Theodore Roosevelt
26th President, 1901-09

Roosevelt's mother, Mittie Bulloch, had Ulster Scots ancestors who emigrated from Glenoe, County Antrim, in 1729.



William Howard Taft
27th President 1909-13

Taft is said to have Irish roots, and his grandson, William Howard Taft III, became the U.S. ambassador to Ireland from 1953 to 1957.



Woodrow Wilson
28th President, 1913-21

Wilson had Ulster-Scot ancestors on both sides of his family.



Warren G. Harding
29th President 1921-23

Of Irish descent, Harding's campaign was influenced by Ireland's War of Independence.



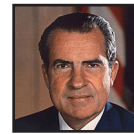
Harry S. Truman
33rd President 1945-53

Truman celebrated his Scotch-Irish history and modeled his politics after the first Scot-Irish president, Andrew Jackson.



John F. Kennedy
35th President 1961-63

Kennedy's ancestors immigrated from Counties Wexford, Limerick and Cavan. Kennedy was the only Irish-Catholic president.



Richard Nixon
37th President, 1969-74

Nixon's Protestant and Quaker ancestors left Counties Antrim and Kildare.



Jimmy Carter
39th President 1977-1981

Carter's roots take him back to County Antrim.



Ronald Reagan
40th President 1981-89

Reagan's ancestors emigrated to the United States from Ballyporeen, County Tipperary, via Canada.



George H. W. Bush
41st President 1989-93

Bush claims Wexford roots and is believed to be a descendant of Richard de Clare, more famously known as Strongbow.



Bill Clinton
42nd President 1993-2001

Although there is no formal documentation, Clinton believes he has ties to County Fermanagh.



George W. Bush
43rd President 2001-09

Bush's are believed to hail from Counties Down and Cork.



Barack Obama
44th President 2009

Obama's maternal ancestors were shoemakers from Moneygall, County Offaly. It's interesting to note that

Obama's Vice President, Joe Biden, has a similar background — both men had a shoemaking, Irish ancestor who arrived in New York City in 1850 — in fact, they landed within five weeks of each other.

Note: Not all information on this page has been officially documented. Further reading at www.inyourpocket.com/northern-ireland/belfast/Northern-Ireland-Highlights-and-Hidden-Gems/On-the-presidential-trail