

2010 August 03

The Edgars in Glengarry County and Abroad

This is mainly an informative piece, hoping to locate more of my family who may have emigrated from Northern Ireland in the early 1800s. Many people have researched families from Ulster and have run into the difficulty that most records found in other locations just don't exist; either the records were destroyed in "The Troubles" or, like the early Irish census records, were deliberately mulched during WWI to re-use the paper. In any case, this does not make Ulster research an insurmountable chore – it's just more difficult.

Several years ago, I responded to an email request on Rootsweb from Steve Edgar of Weston, Crewe, England. He was looking for anyone who might have a connection to his family in Newry, Co. Down, Northern Ireland, in the late 1700s. The little information I had about my great-great-grandfather, Charles Edgar, led me to respond to Steve's query: i.e. Charles was born about 1772 in Newry; he married Susan Cummings in 1795 in Newry. (Since then, I've learned that "Newry" could be one of several places...more on this below.) Steve's ancestor is Joseph Edgar, who owned and operated a rope works on Water Street. The family home was on High Street. Steve also knew that his great-great-grandmother, Jane Edgar, was buried in St. Patrick's churchyard. We actually located the headstone, which records that she is buried there with nine of her children!

We reasoned that Steve and I could be cousins: we both had early relatives from the same town; both ancestors were from the same era; we both had the same surname. It all made sense — we had to be cousins! That forms the basis of our lengthy collaboration — the year was 2003. We exchanged emails and information over the course of the next two years, trying to piece together our two stories. Then we made the bold decision to visit the land of our ancestors; Steve and I would travel to Northern Ireland together to explore our roots. We arrived in Newry at 8:20 sharp on 2005 March 2, after having travelled by car and ferry through most of the night from Crewe.

The two of us were a bit like fish out of water, except that we had a purpose — find some kind of record or family story to unite our two histories. Richard Edgar, a resident of Tandragee, Northern Ireland, joined us for the day — he was a great help with some of our searching. Richard maintains an excellent Web site on Edgars worldwide. The three of us scoured churchyards in Newry, searching for family gravestones; we visited the local museum; we spoke to people on the street; we told our story to anyone who would listen — visiting neighbourhood pubs is a great way to meet people (with the plus of enjoying the odd pint of Guinness!). We even discovered a former church cemetery, now paved over serving as a parking lot for a health centre! Records of the former burials there are still a mystery.

Two little snippets of our stories got us looking in entirely opposite directions — Steve’s family at one time owned or leased farm land in Keggall, to the west of Newry, in Co. Armagh; my great-grandfather, James Edgar, was born in Kilkeel, a town to the east of Newry, at the extreme southeast point of Ulster. Those two bits of “fact” should have been a tipoff for us — they were drawing us apart, rather than together.

After Steve and I plumbed Newry and area for a couple of full days, we “moved” to Belfast for a day of searching records at PRONI (the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland). There are lots of records there, but not much on our two families.

The next day, we were off by ferry to Scotland, heading for Wedderlie, an ancient holding of the Edgar family for over 500 years. Wedderlie is an estate that looms large in the Edgar legend; surrounded by mystery in its latter days. Located just west of Kelso, Scotland, Wedderlie lies at the foot of the Lammermuir Hills, near the village of Westruther. Edgar Burn flows through the property, which was originally a castle and a “keep.” It was expanded in Georgian times to a large manor house, lovingly maintained by the Tilson family as Wedderlie Farm, home to Aberdeen Angus cattle.

There are some great stories and histories from this area, many well documented by the Grampian Club of yesteryear. At this time, Steve and I were reading the history from such accounts as “*An Account of the Surname Edgar: And Particularly of the Family of Wedderlie in Berwickshire*” by James Lawrence-Archer. We were thinking that we were all descended from one man named Edgar, reaching back to King Crinan of Scotland; according to the “*Genealogical collections concerning the Scottish house of Edgar, with a memoir of James Edgar,*” the first Edgar was the son of Cospatrick, 2nd Earl of Dunbar.

We have this quote from the latter collection: *It is probable that in the fourteenth century the House of Wedderlie was more powerfully represented in Nithsdale than in its native county; and it is a question whether the representation of the family early in the seventeenth century did not revert to the head of the House settled in the former locality.*

Towards the close of the thirteenth century an Edgar, Laird of Wedderlie, appears to have been married to a Countess of Home; and immediately afterwards, the fortune of this House seems to have reached the summit of its prosperity, in the reign of King Robert the Bruce, at whose marriage Richard de Edgar was a witness. One of the latter’s four sons was placed by David Bruce at the head of the Clan McGowan, and Wedderlie itself seems to have been resigned to a younger brother, probably the king’s godson.

The Laird of Wedderlie, as co-representative of Robert de Ros, Lord of Sanquhar, through his wife, a daughter of the latter, was allied to the family of one of the competitors for the crown of Scotland in 1292.



Figure 1 Sanquhar today

Note the mention of Sanquhar, another castle northwest of Dumfries, Scotland, that was owned either partly or in whole by the Edgars for many years. It stands in desolate ruin in Nithsdale today, sombre testimony that sandstone is not a building material made to last!

Who wouldn't want to be allied with Robert the Bruce, with the kings of Scotland, to be related to the landed gentry of the time, the owners of Sanquhar and Wedderlie? Of course, we would. So went our thinking, at the time...

The Edgar crest even supports this line of thinking — related or not, we have a pewter badge showing an upraised dagger and the motto “Maun Dae It,” loosely translated from Gaelic as “You must do it.” The story is that, in 1305, to assure his ascendancy to the Scottish throne, Robert the Bruce stabbed John “the Red” Comyn in Greyfriars Church in Dumfries, Scotland. Apparently, Robert hesitated, upon which his companion, Sir Richard Edgar, urged him on with “Maun Dae It!”

Getting back to addresses in Northern Ireland.... After a couple of years of floundering around looking for obscure place names, ones not found on any maps, we came across the “Townland” concept. Interestingly, I had a reference in my great-grandfather's writing (apparently written in 1868) to “Banaugh Townland, near Killkeel.” No modern maps show any such place. “Townland” is a term from the Old English “tun” meaning a homestead or settlement, in Gaelic the term is “bailte fearann”; we see the derivative in modern names, such as Ballynahinch, Ballygowan, and Benraw. (Also seen in Scottish place names, such as “Balmoral.”) In Ireland, a townland is the smallest officially defined geographical division of land. (We are grateful to Ros Davies of Australia for her Co. Down site, where she provides hand-drawn townland maps — most helpful! freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~rosdavies)

We also discovered that, for example, “Newry” could mean the actual city (fourth largest in Northern Ireland); it could mean the parish (Church of Ireland or Roman Catholic); it could also mean the Townland of Newry. In addition, a farm in or near the town of Killkeel could have as its address something like “Drummanmore, Killkeel, Newry, Northern Ireland.” In this case, “Newry” refers to the district council of Newry and Mourne, and includes towns in both Co. Armagh and Co. Down!

The other interesting aspect of Newry is that the River Clanrye divides the city so that Co. Down is on the east side; Co. Armagh is on the west.

Armed with some of this information, our next visit in March 2006, joined by my brother, Steve Edgar of Kamloops, B.C., led us to Benagh Road, which is shown on modern ordnance survey maps, to the west of Killkeel. We popped into a small shop, asking the

proprietor if he knew of any Edgars in the area. He pointed out a home just a few doors down the road, which became our next point of discovery. We knocked on the door and introduced ourselves to the occupant, Mr. Edgar's wife. We came by later in the day to meet him, he being absent on our first contact. We got some of his family details and discovered that SteveUK (the nickname we gave Steve of Crewe – there are so many Steve Edgars!!) had once contacted his wife by telephone, but had dismissed her as not being married to his relative. More on this below.

On that same trip to the UK, we discussed my wife, Jodie's, suggestion (over coffee in downtown Newry) that we should get our DNA tested. She had been doing some reading of genealogical magazines and had seen the subject on genealogical chat rooms, and it got her to thinking this would be the definitive way to prove Steve and my relationship, if there was one.

At the time, DNA testing was just beginning to be popular, and we had to do some searching for a firm that would do the tests for a reasonable price. What Steve found in the UK was far too expensive for our liking — something like £400 per test. Later, in 2007, we chose Relative Genetics in Salt Lake City, Utah, at a much more reasonable \$199 US per test. Mine was the first test, and the results showed me in Haplogroup I1 (originally I1a).

Next, Steve's test revealed that he is in Haplogroup E1b1b (originally E3b). That was the reason we couldn't find a connection between our two families — there wasn't one! Nor would there be one as far back as 20,000 years!!

Richard Edgar of Tandragee was next, and he proved to be Haplogroup R1b. Since that time, and over 70 tests later, we have discovered four distinct DNA Haplogroups: I1, I2b1, E1b1b, and R1b.

In 2007, I urged the Edgar of Benagh Road to have his DNA tested. It turns out that he and I are related, with a common ancestor about 200 years back. The DNA analysis gives an MRCA (Most Recent Common Ancestor) prediction, which in our case showed 14 generations to a common ancestor. By this time, we had numerous email contacts, as the word was spreading around the globe. Another Edgar of Melbourne, Australia, turns out to be the same Haplogroup as myself, with 10 generations to an MRCA; both of these Edgars share the same great-great-grandfather, named Arthur Edgar.

Now, we don't know Arthur's father's name, so it would be pure supposition to guess who he is. In fact, Arthur led us on a goose chase for a while — the name appears on various Web sites as "Doughtry," "Aughtery," and "Oughtry," all meaning "Arty." We also see variations of the Edgar surname as Agar, Adair, Egger, Eager, Edger, Eggo, *etc.*

In any event, Ros Davies' site shows these Edgars living in and around Kilkeel in the 1700s and 1800s (various sources):

Name	Parish	Information
James Edgar (Senior and Junior)	Kilkeel	in 1690s & 1715, leased Aughnalooopy townland with D.A. Edgar for £7.10.0 from Lord Nicholas Bagenal
D.A. Edgar	Kilkeel	in 1715, leased Aughnalooopy townland with James Edgar
Charles Edgar	Kilkeel	a farmer in Benagh in 1803
John Edgar	Kilkeel	a farmer in Benagh in 1803
Doughtry Edgar	Kilkeel	a landlord in Mourne area c. 1816
Oughtry Edgar	Newry	of Benagh; will probated 1816
James Edgar	Kilkeel	son of James Edgar ; aged 28 married Jane Edgar (daughter of John Edgar) 26 Apr 1847
Robert Edgar	Kilkeel	a farmer in Benagh in 1803
John Edgar	Kilkeel	of Drumcrow; executor in the will of David Kinney in 1831
John Edgar	Kilkeel	of Aughnalooopy; will probated in 1832
John Edgar	Kilkeel	will probated 1832; executor was John Edgar of Drumcrow
Arthur Edgar	Kilkeel	of Benagh; husband of Margaret Haddon; father of Catherine b. 31 Mar & bpt. 12 May 1841 & William b. 17 Mar & bpt. 28 Apr 1844 at Mourne Presbyterian Church
Arthur Edgar	Kilkeel	husband of Eliza Thonson; father of Robert b. 10 Mar & bpt. 16 Mar 1842 at Mourne Presbyterian Church
William Edgar	Kilkeel	in 1690s & 1715, leased 1/2 of Benagh & Lisnagowan townlands with William Orr for £11 from Lord Nicholas Bagenal
William Edgar	Kilkeel	of Benagh; a freehold farmer in 1782
William Edgar	Kilkeel	a farmer in Drumcro in 1803
William Edgar	Kilkeel	named on a freehold leased of Neil Sloan of Tullyframe & James Young of Moneydarraghmore & William Sloan of Kilkeel as having a life interest c. 1816
William Edgar	Kilkeel	of Magheramurphy; husband of Jane Coffey ; father of Margaret b. 25 Mar & bpt. 29 Mar 1840 & Jane b. 25 May & bpt. 30 May 1841 & James b. 26 Nov & bpt. 29 Nov 1842 & Elizabeth b. 1 Jan & bpt. 19 Jan 1845 & John b. 14 May & bpt. 3 Aug 1851 at Mourne Presbyterian Church
William Edgar	Newry or Kilkeel	of Benagh; will written on same paper as Margaret Kennen & dated 1802
William Edgar	Kilkeel	of Boat St, Newry; father of Samuel bpt. 17 May 1814 at Newry 1st Non Subscribing Presbyterian Church

So, here's where the speculation comes in: Was the Charles Edgar in Benagh in 1803 my great-great-grandfather? Did he have siblings James, John, Robert, and William? Was Arthur Charles' nephew? Was Arthur's father named William? (This latter guess seems likely, as the name "William Edgar" appears often in the Benagh Road family.)

Now, about Charles Edgar in Canada. The story in the family is that Charles came to Québec in about 1818 with his two sons, James and Robert. They cut down sufficient trees to build a ship, filled it with lumber, and sailed it back to Ireland. There, they sold

the lumber, including the ship, using the proceeds to make their way back to Canada, this time with Susan (Charles' wife), James and Robert, and three daughters Elizabeth, Mary, and Margaret. In about 1820, near Lancaster, Ontario, Charles bought an acreage in Bainsville from Charles Wesley, at Wesley's Point.

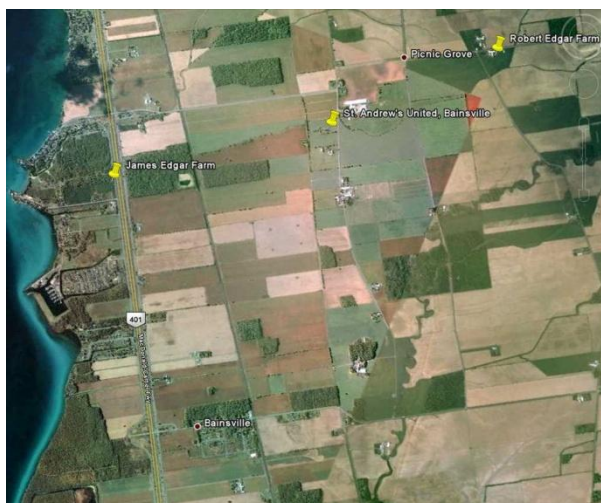


Figure 2 These two views of Bainsville, east of Lancaster, are approximately the same, with the Google Map on the left, and the map from about 1850 on the right. By this time, James Edgar had the riverside property, and Charles and Susan had moved in with Robert, to the north.

My grandfather, Charles Stephen Edgar, and my father, Stephen Leslie Edgar, were both born on the farm at Wesley's Point. My father was the youngest of nine children. I can find all of these on various Canadian Census records, starting in 1851, right up to 1911.

My great-grandfather, James, was struck down and killed by a freight train as he walked down the Grand Trunk track near his home; he was quite deaf and didn't hear the approaching train. With all the records now available on the Internet, this is one that continues to stump me — I can't find his death record anywhere. Nor can I find a record of Susan Edgar's death or burial. I know that Charles, James, Robert, Charles Stephen, and their respective spouses (except Susan) are all buried in the churchyard of St. Andrew's United Church, 2nd Concession, Bainsville.

I can't find any records of birth or marriage in Ireland for my great-great-grandparents, Charles and Susan (née Cummings). Nor can I find records for any of their parents, siblings, or children.

So, the search continues, as we piece together our story and history. If any readers have information that will help fill in some of the blank spaces, please contact me at:

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