

Searching for My Irish Ancestors

By Joseph Silinonte

It does not require many years to realize that tracing one's Irish roots is difficult. You learn to appreciate every bit of information no matter where it was obtained. After about a year and a half of my research (begun in 1980), I finally learned that my great-great-great grandmother Anne O'Neil's maiden name was Scott. I already knew from her tombstone at Holy Cross Cemetery, that she was a native of Killeshandra, County Cavan. I also knew that she had a brother John.

While going through Barber's "Deaths taken from the Brooklyn Eagle", I noticed that John Scott of County Cavan died "December 1870 funeral mass St. Peter's Church, Hicks Street, burial Holy Cross Cemetery". I called the office at Holy Cross and was given a list of internments for the Scott plot. When I heard "Catharine Scott age 103 years" it was hard to believe. Since I was calling from the library I then went to the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* microfilm. I read the following article and felt that Ed McMahon had just sent a winning sweepstakes letter to me (genealogically speaking). Catharine Scott was Anne Scott O'Neil's mother, my great-great-great-great grandmother.

Using the information I was able to write to Dublin, and after a long search the Scott family of Drunnawal, Killeshandra County Cavan was located on the 1841 Irish Census. Killeshandra was the only parish in Cavan to have its census returns survive. I also learned that Catharine's husband died in 1838 just as the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* article had mentioned. His name was John, age 44, and there also was a daughter, Elizabeth, who died in 1840, age 2.

The following article helped to bring my Scott line back to the 18th century. Never underestimate newspapers in your search for your family.

THE BROOKLYN DAILY EAGLE

April 21, 1895

DEATH OF A CENTENARIAN

Mrs. Catharine Scott Was One Hundred and Three Years Old. RETAINED ALL HER FACULTIES

She Read the Newspapers, Had Not a Single Gray Hair, Could Embroider, Had an Excellent Appetite and a Remarkable Memory—She Had Been a Resident of Brooklyn for a Half Century.

Mrs. Catharine Scott, widow, mother of four children, all of whom are now dead, grandmother of twelve grandchildren and about forty-five great grandchildren, died yesterday afternoon at 4 o'clock at her home, 64 Columbia Street, aged 103 years. Mrs.

Scott, as her ripe years would suggest, was in many respects a remarkable woman. She was of dark complexion, had bluish gray eyes, was about 5 1/2 feet in height and weighed about 90 pounds. She had a memory that was something out of the usual line, she read continually, kept herself posted on all of the events of the day, could talk on almost any subject of current interest that could be suggested, was a firm believer in the newspaper, a fact which a number of the members of her family think lengthened her life; was cheerful, bright and chipper in disposition and was fond of giving good old fashioned advice to her friends and numerous descendants. With all of the accumulated years of age she had not a single gray hair on her head and she could see so well that when she was dying she beckoned to her grandson, Jamee, who was sitting in an adjoining room, to come to her, and kissed and recognized a little great granddaughter who was held up to receive her parting words. She was in full possession of her faculties to the last. Her death was due, perhaps to the shock received by a fall about three months ago, when she fractured her thigh, rather than from old age. Police Surgeon Ford, who was her family physician, it is reported, said that she had a most wonderful pair of lungs and that he would give his lungs any day for those of the centenarian. Her appetite was excellent and she retained it up to within three days of her death. She lived regularly and well, arising at an early hour and asking for her breakfast of which she partook at 6 o'clock, insisted on having her dinner at 12 noon and her supper about 6 at night. She was abstemious in her habits only indulging moderately in tea and coffee, occasionally taking as a stimulant a whisky punch or a glass of ale. Her remarkable vitality remained with her almost to the end, many of her closing hours being passed on a sofa instead of in bed, thus showing her hold on life to the last.

Mrs. Scott was born in the County of Cavan, Ireland, about 1792, in fact it is a disputed question whether she was 103 or 108 years. She married a Mr. Scott when she was 30 years old and had three daughters and one son. She used frequently to say that the girls did not marry at as young an age in those days as they do in these hustling times. Her only surviving daughter died about three months ago aged about 60 years. Mrs. Scott came to this country many years ago and

had lived in this city upwards of half a century. For a number of years she was engaged in the family of a Mr. Rapelye, whose old home-stead stood on Court Street, nearly opposite Harrison, and she had seen generation after generation grow up in this family, in whose honor one of the streets of Brooklyn was named.

A pleasing incident is told in connection with Mrs. Scott's latter days. Mr. Rapelye, a well to do New York lumber merchant, descendant of the family in question and a great lover of baseball, happened to meet a few years ago at Washington Park City Auditor O'Brien and made inquiries of the latter about old times, old friends and particularly of old Mrs. Scott. The result was that Mr. Rapelye spent an afternoon at Mrs. Scott's home and the centenarian used to speak of the occasion with mingled feelings of pride and delight. When Mrs. Scott first came to Brooklyn a large part of what now constitutes a great city consisted mainly of farming lands. The water extended up to Hicks Street in South Brooklyn, and the building in which she died stands on ground, snatched, as it were from the river. She occupied part of the time, a little house belonging to the father of the late Vicar General Keehan, adjoining the Church of the Assumption on York Street. She leaves among surviving grandchildren, Mr. Charles O'Neil, an attache of Judge Neu's court; Mrs.

James Hughes, widow of James Hughes, deputy warden of the Kings County penitentiary; and Mr. John O'Neil, a well-known resident of South Brooklyn. Mr. John O'Neil in speaking to an *Eagle* reporter of his grandmother's advanced age, said that while the family had no parish marriage certificate from the old country to go by, his grandmother was 33 years old when his mother was born, that the latter lived 36 years and died thirty-four years ago. His grandmother had been a widow fifty-seven years, her husband having died in 1838. Mr. O'Neil said: "My grandmother was a strong, wiry little woman, of cheerful temperament, who formerly used eyeglasses, but threw they away before she died because she felt that she did not need them. Her memory was nearly perfect and her appetite was as vigorous and healthy as that of a hard working man.

"She was a worker herself, did embroidery, attended to the washing of her clothes because she was very particular as to how they were done up and was a devoted church woman being an attendant of St. Peter's parish." The funeral will take place from Mrs. Scott's late home tomorrow at 2 P.M.

The first printing of Joseph Silinonte's book, *Tombstones of the Irish Born*, was sold out. The second printing, in paperback, will be handled by Heritage Books, 1-800-398-7709. Pre-publication

Anne Scott O'Neill was Catharine Scott's daughter. Mrs. O'Neill's tombstone, shown at right, listed her birthplace in Ireland which enabled her great-great-grandson, Joe Silinonte, to trace the Scott family back to the mid-1780s.

