

# Family History

## Tracking Down Long-Lost Relatives

*The New York Irish History Roundtable received the following "shot-in-the-dark" inquiry letter from New South Wales, inquiring about a relative lost 60 years ago somewhere "in the USA." The painstaking efforts by NYIHR member Elizabeth Caven-Wilhelm to help Mr. Woodcock, recorded in the letter below, constitute virtually a primer on how to track down long-lost relatives. Can any NYIHR members, by any chance, provide a clue to the whereabouts of John Edward "Manny" Watson?*

12 April 1995

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing this letter in the hope that you might be able to help me trace a long lost relative in the USA. The request is mainly in behalf of my aunt: living in Queensland, Australia, for the person we want to trace is her brother. If still alive he would be approaching ninety years of age now. And if no longer living. Well there's still the strong likelihood of his having produced offspring. Either way we'd like very much to learn of his or their whereabouts.

If you are able to assist us in our search we should be extremely grateful. And if any charges are incurred: i.e. document searches, etc., then please do not hesitate to let me know.

We have very little information to help you, I'm afraid, but for what it's worth here it is:

**NAME: JOHN EDWARD WATSON**  
(his nickname was "Manny")  
**DATE OF BIRTH: 8 APRIL 1908 or 1909**  
**PLACE OF BIRTH: IRELAND**

In 1926 or 1927 he was a crew member of a ship sailing from Southampton to New York. In New York he jumped ship, i.e. entered the USA illegally.

From time to time he wrote to various members of his family until around 1935 or 1936, when there was some sort of row or upset within the family, after which he stopped writing. The last address given was 146 West 46th Street. It is believed that he was employed on the White Star Line's MAJESTIC for at least some of those years: incidentally.

The only other contacts known of were Dave & Julia Toohey or Garvey. There is some uncertainty over the surname but they were living somewhere in Brooklyn.

I'm sorry I can't provide further information. If your organization is unable to help then I'd greatly appreciate it if you can suggest any alternative lines of enquiry. Two years ago I wrote to The Ancient Order of Hibernians but received no reply from that quarter.

Thanking you for your kind attention thus far, I remain,  
Yours sincerely,

**Anthony Joseph Woodcock**  
P.O. BOX 1238  
Crows Nest  
New South Wales 2065  
AUSTRALIA

Dear Brother Corry:

I trust that you may remember me—I belong to the Roundtable and we chatted on the telephone prior to the last Irish Genealogy Congress.

We now have something else in common; we are both trying to help Tony Woodcock of Crow's Nest, NSW, Australia, find his elderly, long-lost uncle for his equally elderly aunt.

I received a letter from Tony about a week ago in which he mentioned the name Emmett Corry as a person who was also trying to help him locate his uncle, John Edward Watson. I thought I'd drop you a note and let you know what I've done thus far so that we don't duplicate our efforts.

First—I went to the computerized National Telephone

Directory and printed out all of the Watsons with the correct first name or initial. I sent this information to Tony with the suggestion that he have post cards printed up and sent out to any or all Watsons listed.

Second—I checked the Social Security death records but found no John nor Edward Watson listed, therefore, unless "Eddy" died prior to 1964 or after 1993, he could possibly still be alive.

Third—I checked the Veteran's Administration but again found no John nor Edward Watson listed as having served in the U.S. military.

Fourth—since "Eddy" Watson was known to have lived in New York City in the mid thirties, I wrote to the Census

Bureau and asked for an application to have the 1940 census checked just in case "Eddy" still lived in New York. An application has been sent to Tony Woodcock with instructions as to how to go about getting the census opened.

Fifth—and back to the Social Security Administration—to whom I sent a photostat of the letter which appeared in the Irish American Magazine and asked their assistance in locating "Eddy" via his Social Security number; presuming that he remained in this country and had applied for one. Per their instructions, I enclosed a stamped, unsealed envelope addressed to John Edward Watson (no address of course) and requested that, if they found him, they send him the copy of Tony's letter. This request went through the office of my Congresswoman. I thought that maybe her office would have a bit more "pull" than one by a mere tax-paying citizen.

Sixth—I wrote to the "current owner" of 146 West 46 Street (long shot) and asked if they could help with any old information that they might still have. I was in New York about four months ago and had dinner in one of the restaurants on West 46th Street and there's a very good chance that the old building is still standing . . . but of course this is a very long shot.

Seventh—Tony mentioned that his uncle may have married a gal by the name of Helen. I sent Tony the name of four Catholic churches in the area and suggested that he write to each and ask if they had any record of a marriage for John Edward Watson or baptismal records of any children.

Eighth—Forgetting that I'd suggested that Tony write to the four churches, I wrote to Sacred Heart on West 51st (my mother's old parish) and to Holy Cross (my father's old parish) on West 42nd Street. The other two churches were St. Raphael's on West 41 Street and Holy Innocents on West 24th Street. These two I did not write to. By the way, my mother lived on Tenth Avenue which she always called Double Fifty.

Ninth—Another long-shot—I wrote to a David Garvey on West 66th Street and asked if he could help.

Tenth—There was only one David Toohey listed with the Veterans Administration and his age made him a contemporary of "Eddy" Watson. This David Toohey was issued his Social Security card in New York City but he died in Kentucky. I found a Toohey family living in the same zip code area as that was shown on David Toohey's death benefit record. So I wrote to them. No answer yet. I think I wrote to two or three other Tooheys in the area as well. I suspect that they are all related and I'm hoping that at least one will reply.

I also suggested that Tony get in touch with the Cunard Line which is the company that took over the old White Star Line. I suggested that they "grovel a tad" and maybe someone at Cunard might go into their old files and find a newer address for "Eddy."

And finally, I asked my local police chief (who owes me a few favors) to see if he could locate "Eddy" He called today and said that I'd exhausted most means of finding Eddy and suggested that "Eddy" might have gone undercover and wanted to fall from sight. My comment to the chief was that "he was thinking like a cop."

Anyway that's where I stand in my "hunt for Eddy". Now

I can only wait and see if anyone answers any of my letters and hope that the Social Security Administration forwards my correspondence to John Edward Watson - if indeed he is alive.

I do not have access to any NY death records here but the possibility exists that "Eddy" may have died prior to 1964 or after 1993. If he died in New York City, he would be listed at the Chambers Street archives. Perhaps you could find a Roundtable member who works in downtown Manhattan and who would have time to pop in and check the microfilm . If "Eddy" died in New York, his death certificate would probably give the name of the informant and it could very well be a son or daughter . . . and Tony would have a new found American cousin.

The thought occurred to me that since churches are being bombarded with requests of a genealogical nature that they might not have time to hunt into their old files for Eddy's marriage records—or for that matter perhaps even the baptismal records of possible children born in the late thirties or early forties perhaps however you'd have a bit of pull in that regard.

Anyway that's what I've been up to—and I do hope that between us we can find this elusive "Eddy." I will keep you posted on whatever turns up. Would love to know how you're making out in your "hunt for Eddy."

Regards to New York and the Roundtable. I wish I could make some of the meetings. Must run . . . hope all's well.

**Betty**  
**(Elizabeth Caven-Wilhelm)**

### Missing Persons Circa 1880s

*The Irish Nation*, the republican newspaper edited by Fenian stalwart John Devoy, ran a column requesting information on missing persons. "Arrivals from Ireland: Exiles of Erin Seeking a Home under the Stars and Stripes" attempted to help readers who wrote in seeking information on immigrants who disappeared into the American hinterlands.

In a task akin to one of the seven labors of Hercules, John Ridge (who wrote the lead article in this issue), on his own, during his commutes to and from work, has been keypunching into his laptop computer the more than 25,000 entries he found listed in the column. Names, county of origin in Ireland, and reported destination when lost are all reported.

John will publish the entries of the lost emigres in a book soon to be published called *Irish Immigrants: County Origins and Destinations*. John has been puzzling over why so many immigrants went to particular parts of the U.S. seeking work. Why, for example, did so many Irish from Antrim seek work in Paterson, New Jersey?



(Left) "Under the Gang Plank," by Sister Anne Therese Dillen, O.S.U. In 1991 Sister Anne toured Ireland, writing poems like the one below, sketching, and painting scenes of the Great Hunger. She is currently exhibiting several dozen paintings which make up her "Visual Narrative of the Great Irish 'Famine' of 1845-1849" at galleries around New York. Her next exhibition will be at the Bridge Gallery in White Plains. Sr. Anne's work includes depictions of the ghastly grave mound at Abbey Leix, the tragic drownings at Doo Lough in Mayo, and the imagined scene to the left — in the steerage hold of a coffin ship bound for America.

## Dark Rosaleen

I thirst, parched beside the  
 heather-laden bogs —  
 no Samaritan for me;  
 no one here to see  
 that I shall die amidst the  
 plenty in the field —  
 and that its yield  
 will sail to shores beyond the sea.

How can it be  
 that flocks of sheep can find their fill  
 while I lie empty and in pain?  
 Or is it vain  
 to beg attention to my plight?

How can I fight  
 when I am listless, drained, alone,  
 shrunken to the bone  
 while others eat what I have  
 grown in toil?

Woman of the soil —  
 I fade against a wall of human greed  
 and — sower of the seed —  
 I languish  
 as it grows . . . .

Anne Therese Dillen OSU ©