

Norris Families Residing in Maghera Parish, Derry County, Northern Ireland Between 1740-1859

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Purpose:

An overwhelming amount genealogical information exists for the Norris families emigrating from Derry County, Northern Ireland and settling in Western Pennsylvania. Well documented historical information pertaining to the six brothers of Robert Jr., Daniel, Adam, John, James and Henry Norris has been established. However, little is known about their father - Robert Norris Sr. Thus, the purpose of this research project is to discover additional information pertaining to the Robert Norris Sr. family and other Norris families who resided in Maghera Parish, Derry County, Northern Ireland between 1740 - 1859.

Acknowledgments:

This Norris family genealogical project, which began as a high school sociology class assignment in 1980, has been a work in progress for more than 25 years. I wish to thank Mr. William Riley, former Pine-Richland School District Teacher, Gibsonia, Pennsylvania (PA) for the introduction into genealogy. My grandparents, Joseph and Margaret Norris of Gibsonia, PA for providing me with much of the initial family information. Additional family researchers who have contributed information have included Dorothy (Dot) Voeckel of Tarentum, PA and Patricia Schnell, Tonasket, WA. Luck intervened as I was placed in contact with Richard Frew, a Derry County, Northern Ireland Genealogist, whose efforts made this project possible. His keen knowledge of historical documents, particularly church related records, and dedicated service produced or confirmed most of the following research.

United States Documentation Pertaining to the Norris Family of Western Pennsylvania:

In order to progress further back into Norris family history, it was necessary to assemble as many “known” pieces of information as possible to be used as a basis. Many of these foundation pieces pertaining to the sons of Robert Norris Sr. were gained through U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Records, U.S. Ship Passenger Lists, Pennsylvania Census Records, John Norris’ Marriage Certificate and Family Historians. A discussion of these records and the relevant information they have provided follows. The following records were, predominately, obtained through the U.S. National Archives and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS).

Robert Norris Jr. and his wife, Mary, emigrated from the port of Londonderry in December 1810 and arrived in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in June 1811.

The 1820 Pennsylvania Census lists Robert Norris Jr. and his wife’s age between 26-45, one son aged 10-15 years and four females under 10 years old, thus confirming their presence in Western Pennsylvania.

James and Adam Norris’ Immigration and Naturalization Documents dated March 26, 1827 reveal their departure from Belfast, Ireland in 1822. James arrived in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Adam in the Village of Champlain, New York.

The 1900 Pennsylvania Census lists Henry Norris departing from Ireland in 1822 as well. At the time, he would have been about eight years old.

John Norris married Mary Moore in New Brunswick, Canada on January 7, 1828. He later owned a farm in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania by the time of the 1830 Pennsylvania Census.

Daniel and Adam Norris were listed on the 1830 Pennsylvania Census in Allegheny County. James Norris appears on the 1840 Butler County, Buffalo Township Census.

This documentation verifies these Norris brothers emigrated from Ireland by 1830 and resided in Western Pennsylvania. No records were discovered to suggest Robert Sr. left Ireland. Some family historians suggest Robert's wife, Martha, may have immigrated to the United States with one or more of her sons, but longed to return to Ireland. John Norris did not arrive in New Brunswick, Canada until 1828, despite the fact most of the family had left Ireland by 1822. He may have accompanied his mother back to Ireland sometime between 1822 - 1828. No additional evidence was found to prove or disprove this claim. Additionally, no records have been located to substantiate Robert Sr. had two daughters commonly referred to as Nancy and Ester.

Irish Records Pertaining to the Norris Family of Maghera Parish:

The Church of Ireland (COI), Maghera Parish Baptism Records list three Norris families in Swatragh, Derry County, Northern Ireland in 1787. Their names are: William & Elizabeth, James & Mary, and John & Martha Norris. Their children with baptism dates are tabled below.

Norris Families In Maghera Parish - 1787			
Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	
William Sr. & Elizabeth	John & Martha	James & Mary	← First Generation
1787 Robert 1790 William Jr.	1788 Thomas	1788/90 Elizabeth 1793 William	← Second Generation

Table 1

Note: The child named Elizabeth in Table 1, Column 3 was listed twice on the Maghera COI Church Records as baptized in 1788 and 1790, presumably because the first child died and James & Mary used the name - Elizabeth - for a second daughter.

Although not listed on the Maghera COI Baptism Records, Robert Norris Sr. will be added to Table 2 based on established family knowledge. His burial information was obtained through the Kilrea COI, which dated his death as April 16, 1845. Robert Sr. was 84 years old at the time of his death and this establishes his birth in either 1760 or 1761.

A marriage document for Robert Norris Sr. and a woman named Martha was discovered for a marriage taking place in Ardboe Parish in 1791. Considering Robert Jr. was born in 1785/87 and

was the half-brother to the rest of the siblings, this marriage appears to have been between Robert Sr. and his second wife. His first wife's name is unknown, but is suspected to be Nancy or Jane, since most of Robert Sr.'s sons named their daughters as such.

Based on a ship passenger list for the vessel - Experiment - leaving the port of Londonderry, Derry County, Ireland in April 1805, John & Martha Norris of Maghera Parish were accompanied by James, John and Mary, presumably their children. John and Martha were listed as 58 years old with James at 24, John 19 and Mary 18 years old. This places John & Martha's date of birth in 1746 or 1747. James, John and Mary would have been born in 1780/81, 1785/86 and 1786/87, respectively. These three children's date of birth would have excluded them from the Maghera COI Baptism Records, which did not begin until sometime in 1787. It is speculated John & Martha's son, Thomas, had died prior to 1805, for he was not a ship passenger with the rest of his family, nor have any records surfaced to validate his continued presence in Maghera Parish.

The resulting Table 2 is displayed below.

Table 2

Norris Families In Maghera Parish - 1787			
Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
William Sr. & Elizabeth	John & Martha Both born in 1746/47	James & Mary	Robert Sr. & Martha Robert Sr. 1760/61-1845 Married 1791 in Ardboe
1787 Robert 1/ 1790 William Jr. 1/	1780/81 James 2/ 1785/86 John 2/ 1786/87 Mary 2/ 1788 Thomas 1/ 3/	1788/90 Elizabeth 1/ 1793 William 1/	1785/87 Robert Jr. 4/ 1798 Daniel 4/ 1800 Adam 4/ 1801 John 4/ 1805 James 4/ 1814 Henry 4/ Nancy & Ester??? 4/
1/ Maghera COI Baptism Records 2/ Ship - Experiment - Passenger List		3/ Deceased - Speculated 4/ Family Knowledge	

Based on the passenger list for the Ship - Experiment, John & Martha and their children emigrated from Maghera Parish to New York on April 25, 1805. All of Robert Sr. & Martha's children appear to have emigrated from Maghera Parish as well, beginning in 1810. The highlighted entries on Table 3 below designate those family members who left County Derry.

Table 3

Norris Families In Maghera Parish - 1787			
Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
William Sr. & Elizabeth	John & Martha Both born in 1746/47	James & Mary	Robert Sr. & Martha Robert Sr. 1760/61-1845 Married 1791 in Ardboe
1787 Robert 1/ 1790 William Jr. 1/	1780/81 James 2/ 1785/86 John 2/ 1786/87 Mary 2/ 1788 Thomas 1/ 3/	1788/90 Elizabeth 1/ 1793 William 1/	1785/87 Robert Jr. 4/ 1798 Daniel 4/ 1800 Adam 4/ 1801 John 4/ 1805 James 4/ 1814 Henry 4/ Nancy & Ester??? 4/
1/ Maghera COI Baptism Records 2/ Ship - Experiment - Passenger List		3/ Deceased - Speculated 4/ Family Knowledge	

The results of an additional baptism record from the Maghera COI will be placed on Table 4. This record pertains to James & Mary’s son, James Jr. James Jr. and his wife, Elizabeth, baptized their son, William, in 1808. They are not listed on Table 3, but will be placed on Table 4.

A marriage document from the First Presbyterian Church of Garvagh lists Robert Norris Jr. marrying a ___ Boyde in July or August of 1826. The ___ line was not filled in by the recorder, but her name was found to be Mary Jane. Robert Sr. was in attendance at this marriage, but this is not the Robert Sr. in Column 4 of Table 3. In other words, this is the Robert listed in Column 1 and not the one whose sons immigrated to Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, listed in Column 4. This Robert will be assigned the suffix of “Sr.” and shall be placed on Table 4.

Thus, James Jr. becomes a 2nd generation family member. Robert Jr. will be listed in Column 1 and William in Column 3 and they become 3rd generation males and have been plotted on Table 4 as follows.

Norris Families In Maghera Parish - 1787				
Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	
William Sr. & Elizabeth	John & Martha Both born in 1746/47	James & Mary	Robert Sr. & Martha Robert Sr. 1760/61-1845 Married 1791 in Ardboe	← First Generation
1787 Robert Sr. 1/ 1790 William Jr. 1/	1780/81 James 2/ 1785/86 John 2/ 1786/87 Mary 2/ 1788 Thomas 1/ 3/	1788/90 Elizabeth 1/ 1793 William 1/ James Jr. & Elizabeth 1/	1785/87 Robert Jr. 4/ 1798 Daniel 4/ 1800 Adam 4/ 1801 John 4/ 1805 James 4/ 1814 Henry 4/ Nancy & Ester??? 4/	← Second Generation
Robert Jr. & Mary Jane 5/		1808 William 1/		← Third Generation
1/ Maghera COI Baptism Records		4/ Family Knowledge		
2/ Ship - Experiment - Passenger List		5/ First Garvagh Presbyterian Church Marriage Record-1826		
3/ Deceased - Speculated				

Table 4

Next, land related records were pursued, which included the 1828 Tithe Applotment for County Derry and the 1831 Derry County Census for Maghera Parish.

The Composition Act of 1823 specified that tithes due to the Established Church (Church of Ireland-COI), which had been payable in kind, should now be paid in money. As a result, it was necessary to carry out a valuation of the entire country by civil parish to determine how much money would be payable by each landholder. This was done over the next 15 years and completed for Maghera Parish in 1828.

The results of the 1828 Tithe Applotment and 1831 Derry County Census reveal Norris residents in Maghera Parish during this time period, which provides credence to the listed family relationships indicated in Table 4.

The 1831 Derry County Census lists head of household persons by name and indicates how many others were in the household, and their religion(s).

Listed below are the 1828 Derry County Tithe Applotment Index entries for Norris families:

James Norris, Culnagrew, Maghera
James Norris Jr., Culnagrew, Maghera
John Norris, Swatragh, Maghera
Robert Norris, Swatragh, Maghera
Robert Norris, Swatragh, Maghera
Robert Norris Jr., Swatragh, Maghera
William Norris Jr., Swatragh, Maghera
William Norris, Swatragh, Maghera
William Norris, Tamlaght 'O' Crilly, Innishrush

Listed below are the 1831 Derry County Census entries for Norris families:

Maghera Parish:

Culnagrew Townland:

James Norris, house Number (No.) 2, 1 family 3 persons, Established Church (COI)
James Norris, house No. 3, Vacant
(James Norris owns house No. 2 & No. 3, but lives in house No. 2)
James Norris, house No. 33, 1 family 8 persons, (COI)

Swatragh Townland:

William Norris, house No. 19, 1 family 3 persons, (COI)
Robert Norris, house No. 20, 1 family 3 persons, (COI)

Swatragh Village:

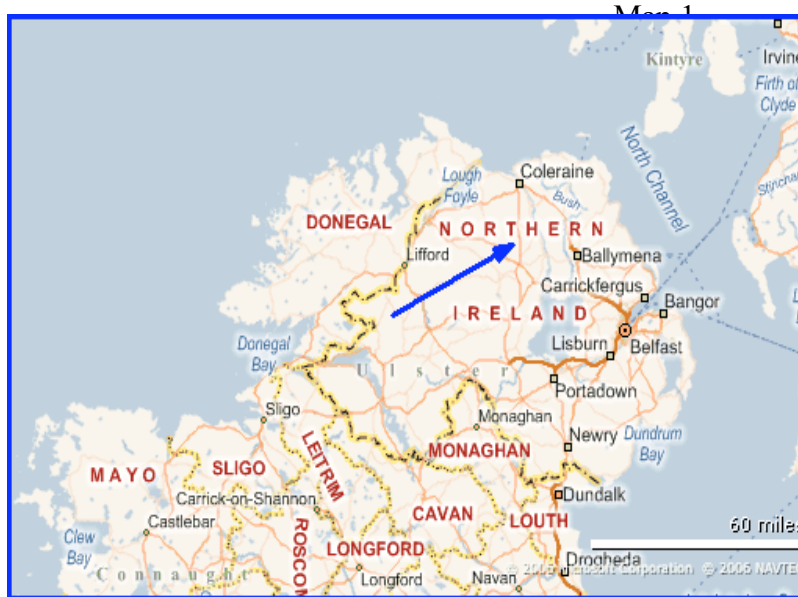
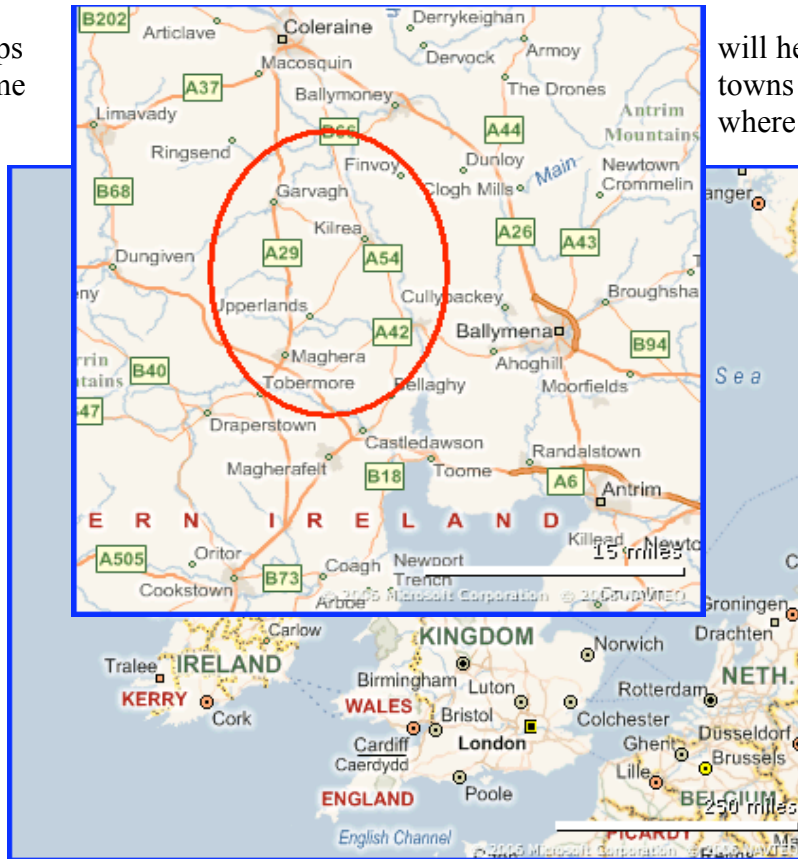
Robert Norris, house No. 26, 1 family 3 persons, (COI)
Robert Norris, house No. 36, Vacant
William Norris, house No. 38, 1 family 2 persons, 1 (COI), 1 Roman Catholic
John Norris, house No. 39, 1 family 4 persons, (COI)

Innishrush:

Robert Norris house No. 34, 1 family 7 persons, Presbyterian
William Norris house No. 18, 1 family 6 persons, (COI)

The following maps will help to identify the location of some towns and townlands in Maghera Parish where Norris families resided.

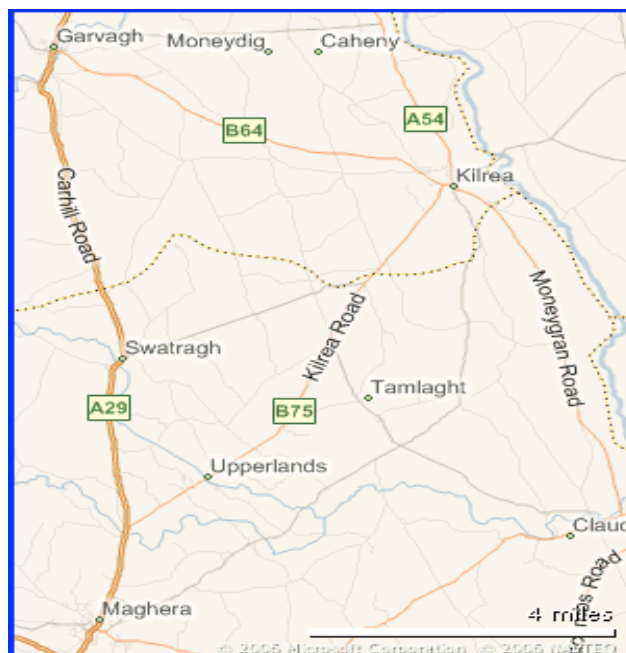
will help to identify towns and townlands where Norris families resided.



Map 2

Map 3

Map 3



Map 4

Additional towns not shown on the maps where Norris' resided and their direction and distances from Swatragh include:

- Swatragh to Culnagrew - 1.5 miles North East
- Swatragh to Dreenan - 5.5 miles South, South East
- Swatragh to Innishrush - 6 miles East, South East

Considering the remaining families listed in Table 5 below, they closely match the results of the 1828 Tithe Applotment and 1831 Derry County Census. The only person unaccounted for is

John Norris. Obviously, he is the son of either William & Elizabeth or James & Mary Norris. I suspect he is the son of William & Elizabeth Norris, since they owned lands around Swatragh and James & Mary were identified in the Cullnagrew area. Therefore, I placed John in Column 1, Table 5 as the son of William & Elizabeth. For the purpose of land record documents, Robert Norris Sr. in Column 4, born in 1760/61, is not considered “Sr.” on the 1828 Tithe Applotment, since his son, Robert Jr., immigrated to Western Pennsylvania. His suffix was, therefore, removed from Table 5.

Table 5

Norris Families In Maghera Parish - 1828				
Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	
William Sr. & Elizabeth	John & Martha Both born in 1746/47	James & Mary	Robert & Martha Robert 1760/61-1845 Married 1791 in Ardboe	← First Generation
1787 Robert Sr. 1/ 1790 William Jr. 1/ John 6/	1780/81 James 2/ 1785/86 John 2/ 1786/87 Mary 2/ 1788 Thomas 1/ 3/	1788/90 Elizabeth 1/ 1793 William 1/ James Jr. & Elizabeth 1/	1785/87 Robert Jr. 4/ 1798 Daniel 4/ 1800 Adam 4/ 1801 John 4/ 1805 James 4/ 1814 Henry 4/ Nancy & Ester??? 4/	← Second Generation
Robert Jr. & Mary Jane 5/		1808 William 1/		← Third Generation
1/ Maghera COI Baptism Records		4/ Family Knowledge		
2/ Ship - Experiment - Passenger List		5/ First Garvagh Presbyterian Church Marriage Record-1826		
3/ Deceased - Speculated		6/ Speculated		
1828 Tithe Applotment for Maghera Parish				
William Swatragh		James Cullnagrew	John Swatragh	Robert Swatragh
William Jr. Swatragh		James Jr. Cullnagrew		Robert Swatragh
William Tamlaght 'O' Crilly Innishrush				Robert Jr. Swatragh
1831 Derry County Census for Maghera Parish				
William Swatragh Townland		James Cullnagrew	John Swatragh Village	Robert Swatragh Townland
William Swatragh Village		James Cullnagrew		Robert Swatragh Village
William Innishrush				Robert Swatragh Village

All known Norris emigrants from Maghera Parish, Derry County, Northern Ireland were removed from Table 6, as well as, female names, dates and footnotes. William, a 3rd generation male listed on Table 5, Column 3 was removed from Table 6 simply because he is believed to

have been of insufficient age to own property in 1828. Thus, the remaining names represent Norris head of households in the Maghera area in 1828.

These tabled family members perfectly match the 1828 Derry County Tithe Applotment and 1831 Derry County Census Documents.

Table 6

Norris Families In Maghera Parish - 1828								
Column 1		Column 2		Column 3		Column 4		
William Sr.				James Sr.		Robert		← First Generation
Robert Sr. William Jr. John				William James Jr.				← Second Generation
Robert Jr.								← Third Generation
1828 Tithe Applotment for Maghera Parish								
William Swatragh				James Culnagrew		John Swatragh		Robert Swatragh
William Jr. Swatragh				James Jr. Culnagrew				Robert Swatragh
William Tamlaght 'O' Crilly Innishrush								Robert Jr. Swatragh
1831 Derry County Census for Maghera Parish								
William Swatragh Townland				James Culnagrew		John Swatragh Village		Robert Swatragh Townland
William Swatragh Village				James Culnagrew				Robert Swatragh Village
William Innishrush								Robert Swatragh Village

Table 7 connects the Norris head of household members with names listed on the 1828 Derry County Tithe Applotment as follows.

Norris Families In Maghera Parish - 1828							
Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4				
William Sr.		James Sr.	Robert	← First Generation			
Robert Sr.		William		← Second Generation			
William Jr.		James Jr.					
John				← Third Generation			
Robert Jr.							
1828 Tithe Applotment for Maghera Parish							
William Swatragh		James Culnagrew	John Swatragh	Robert Swatragh			
William Jr. Swatragh		James Jr. Culnagrew		Robert Swatragh			
William Tamlaght 'O' Crilly Innishrush				Robert Jr. Swatragh			
1831 Derry County Census for Maghera Parish							
William Swatragh Townland		James Culnagrew	John Swatragh Village	Robert Swatragh Townland			
William Swatragh Village		James Culnagrew		Robert Swatragh Village			
William Innishrush				Robert Swatragh Village			

Table 7

Norris' Listed on Griffith's Valuation for Maghera Parish Between 1856 - 1859:

Ireland's Valuation Office conducted its first survey of property ownership in Ireland between 1848 - 1864. This survey became known as "Griffith's Valuation" after Richard Griffith, who was the office director at the time. This survey was used to determine the amount of tax each person should pay toward the support of the poor within their poor law union. This involved determining the value of all privately held lands and buildings in rural, as well as, urban areas in order to calculate the rate at which each unit of property could be rented year after year.

By the time this property valuation was conducted in Derry County between 1856 - 1859, the following Norris families were listed as property owners. Maryanne Norris of Dreenan owned 5 acres, which was a normal sized farm for the time. It is believed she would have been the unmarried daughter of Robert Norris Jr. John and William Norris, both of Swatragh, each owned only a house and a garden. Elizabeth Norris of Swatragh had a large farm with slightly more than 16 acres. I am uncertain as to how she fits into the family. Although, she may have been the widow of Robert or William Norris of Swatragh. James Norris of Cullnagrew had a 24-acre farm, which was a considerable amount of acreage for the time.

Griffith's Valuation was conducted nearly 70 years after the original four Norris families were established residents in the Swatragh area. Considering there were three remaining Norris farms between 1856 - 1859, it is strongly believed the original four family members were all engaged in farming. Two headstone inscriptions were found for Norris widows, which listed them as "farmer's wives." Headstone inscriptions were obtained for Robert and William Norris, which listed them as farmers. These records were obtained from the General Register's Office (GRO) of Northern Ireland and appear as:

Mary Jane Norris, died 1/9/1891, 80 years old, widow of Robert Norris, farmer, Dreenan.
Elizabeth Norris, died 7/12/1877, 67 years old, farmer's wife.
Robert Norris, died 1/18/1892, 56 years old, farmer, Cullnagrew.
William Norris, died 4/8/1877, 30 years old, farmer, Swatragh.

Summary of Initial Findings:

The research findings support four initial Norris families in the Swatragh area of Maghera Parish, Derry County, Northern Ireland during the late 1700's. Most, if not all, were engaged in farming and owned average to larger than average acreages for the time. All of the families had children born in the mid 1780 time period. The second generation males were commonly named Robert, William, John and James, which matches the male names in the first generation. Immigration to the United States began with John, Martha and their children in 1805. Their whereabouts after arriving in New York are unknown.

An interesting fact pertaining to the four first generation Norris males is that none of them had the same first name. This observation leads me to believe they were brothers. It seems more plausible if they were more distant relatives, as cousins, we would find duplication in their first names, such as two or more men named Robert, for example. Additionally, each of the four families were having children in the late 1700's. Robert Sr., I suspect, was the youngest brother and John appears to be the oldest. There is a 13 - 15 year age difference between them. Not enough of an age gap to be of a father / son relationship, but a probable older and younger brother relationship existed.

Progressing to the Next Norris Generation:

Three Norris males were listed on the 1740 Derry County Protestant Head of Household Index. Two of them, namely, James and John Norris, resided in the northern part of Derry County near the town of Coleraine in Ballyrashane Parish. One, however, another James Norris, lived in Kilrea, which is located less than 4 miles North East of Swatragh. I suspect James is the father of the four Norris sons discussed above.

There has been no other information found pertaining to James Norris of Kilrea. However, I suspect his birth date to be between 1715-1720 for him to be a head of household by 1740.

An unconfirmed, but interesting comment was obtained by Richard Frew, while in conversation with Mr. Williamson, Clerk of the Swatragh Presbyterian Church. Williamson stated he heard the Norris family in Swatragh descended from a Captain Norris (Ship Captain) who was granted land in the area. This is certainly not an implausible scenario given the amount of land they held compared to the norm. An initial, cursory search failed to locate a Captain Norris with any known relationship to the Norris families of Maghera Parish.

Additional pursued Norris related documentation included a review of the 1663 Hearth Money Rolls and the 1766 Religious Census, which produced no relevant Norris information.

Conclusion and Further Research Possibilities:

A comprehensive, exhaustive search into Derry County church and land related documents, as well as, conversations with local residents familiar with the Norris family in Maghera Parish has been completed. I am satisfied this project gleaned most, if not all, information from record sources currently available. As a result, it appears plausible the family obtained land granted to a Captain Norris. James Norris of Kilrea certainly appears to be the earliest known beneficiary of these granted lands, followed by his four sons residing in and around the Swatragh area.

My goal remains as the continued pursuit of Norris related records with the objective of progressing the family's history to the next generation(s). My pursuit omits many other research possibilities open to fellow Norris researchers. Some available avenues of pursuit include:

- 1) Locating John & Martha Norris and their three children's place of residence after leaving Maghera Parish in 1805 and arriving in New York. Identifying their lineage could produce further insight into the families originating around Swatragh, Northern Ireland. In other words, we may find additional Norris researchers with our common ancestry to gain potential furthered family knowledge.

A cursory search of U.S. Census Records beginning in 1810 for New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Maryland produced no confirmed documentation pertaining to John, Martha or their children. Unfortunately, New Jersey's Census Records conducted between 1790 - 1820 were destroyed. New Jersey was a probable location of this family.

- 2) Compiling a family tree for the families remaining in Maghera Parish constitutes an available research project. I have obtained additional baptism, birth and burial records for many Norris family members residing in Maghera Parish during the mid to late 1800 time period. Copies of the 1901 Derry County Census are available as well. Most of which were not relevant to this project's goal, but would be invaluable research for further Norris family tree compilation. I will gladly forward this information to anyone wishing to have it, or use it for further Norris genealogical pursuits.
- 3) Assembling ship passenger lists for vessels transporting Norris relatives from Maghera Parish to the United States is possible furthered research, which might identify additional Norris researchers. Several sources, including the U.S. National Archives, LDS and internet websites provide searchable databases for ship passenger lists. I have acquired some passenger lists and will make them available upon request.

Contact Information:

Listed below is my current address and phone number. Please do not hesitate to contact me for further available information, clarification, or to convey suggested updates or rebuttals with this Norris family research project. This research project is available in electronic format upon request.

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