

Which Irish Jeremiah O'Keefe of New York?

Jeremiah was the name of a prophet from 600 BCE and has been a popular boy's name throughout the ages, and in Ireland was often used as an 'English' substitute for the Gaelic name Darmuid. The name O'Keefe dates to the 11th century in the Irish Kingdom of Deis Muin and O'Keefe's had been settling in the US from the mid 19th century.

So, when I came across the name Jeremiah O'Keefe as the first husband of Mary (Marion) Walshe I figured there might have been more than one of them around in New York in the early 1900's. In fact, there were quite a few potential candidates for Marion's spouse and what follows describes each of them and why I have chosen one as the most likely husband.

Marion Walsh married twice, and her second husband Francis (Frank) Buchanan was the nephew of my x2 great grandmother.

Frank married Marion in Manhattan in 1925 and while Marion bore the surname O'Keefe the US Social Security Applications and Claims Index records her parents as John Walsh and Mary Muldowney. It seemed logical to presume Marion had married an O'Keefe before she wed Frank. This was supported by the 1930 Federal Census which recorded her age at first marriage as 28 indicating she married around 1918 (in addition to 1925).

A search of the NY Marriage Indexes identified the marriage of a Marion Walsh to a Jeremiah O'Keefe on 19 October 1917 also in Manhattan. The couple were living at 2221 8th Avenue according to the 1920 census. Sadly, Jeremiah died 11 February 1922 in Manhattan.

So, who was this Jeremiah? The 1920 census recorded him as 37 years of age. His parents were both Irish, as was he, and he was a naturalised US citizen. He had arrived in 1895 and was naturalised in 1903 and he was working as a clerk in a hotel. He was recorded as 36 years old when he died in 1922. At this point the search was on for an Irishman in New York born some time in the early 1880's.

And there were at least nine to choose from. For each Jeremiah O'Keefe I have identified I have kept them and their supporting documents in my Palmer Rogers tree on Ancestry.com using the suffix feature to number each of them. In this paper I will name them JO'K [number] to distinguish between the numerous namesakes, aligned to the number I have assigned them in my tree.

Otherwise married Jeremiahs

To start with, several of the Jeremiahs were easy to discount because they had other spouses and survived beyond 1922. These were –

JO'K 2 born 1888 in Kerry, Ireland arrived in NY in 1903 aboard the Teutonic travelling out with his older brother Patrick bound for Glens Falls in Warren county, New York where another brother Andrew was living on Mohisan Street. There are records showing his continuous residence in Glens Falls and in 1921 he married Nora O'Halloran. In the 1930's he moved to Fort Edward in Washington county, NY and died in 1972.

Another Jeremiah for whom I have found alternate marriage records is JO'K 3, husband of Julia O'Callaghan. Census records suggest he arrived in the US in 1906 and was naturalised a US citizen in 1914. In 1920 he and Julia were living at 316 East 90th Street and had 2 children. This was clearly not my Jeremiah.

Also, out of the frame is JO'K 4. He was born 12 December 1881 but in the same year our Marion married her Jeremiah this Jeremiah O'Keefe married Anna Kiley and they are recorded in the 1920 census at 112 Ashburton Avenue, Yonkers, NY. Whilst perhaps too young for the man I was seeking I also looked into JO'K 5 born circa 1891 but it seems he did not arrive in the US until after 1920 and married Catherine Keane in Manhattan in 1923.

Unmarried Jeremiahs

There is another Jeremiah who was clearly in the frame. He had naturalisation records in early 1905 indicating he had arrived in 1898 and giving his date of birth as 1 December 1883. All of this was very much in line with the records I had. The age matched the 1920 census though this Jeremiah's naturalisation took place 2 years later and he had arrived 3 years after Marion's husband was supposed to have made it to the USA. I don't know a lot about this JO'K number 6 other than that he was living at 42 East 133rd Street when he was naturalised on 20 February and that he supposedly had arrived at the Port of NY on 9 April 1898. He was a labourer and a John E O'Keefe also resided at his same address. His witness was a William Coakley. I've not been able to find any contemporaneous record of his arrival in the US.

Next is JO'K 7. He was from Sheskin in county Mayo and arrived at New York aboard the Campania on 16 April 1904 aged 20. He was to join his sister at 232 East 86th Street. He declared his intention to become a US citizen on 23 January 1905 stating he had been born in 1884 and by which time he was living at 219 East 28th Street. I've yet to find any other records of this man.

There was yet another Jeremiah O'Keefe living in New York about this time who was the right age for Marion's husband. In the 1910 Federal census there is JO'K 8 living with Timothy and Ellen McCarthy at 331 East 43rd Street. JO'K 8 had arrived in NY aboard the Campania the year before to join his cousin Timothy McCarthy at the same address he was recorded at in the 1910 census. The ship's manifest says he had previously been in New York 1907/8. This Jeremiah had been born around 1883 and hailed from county Tipperary.

In summary I have discounted Jeremiahs 6, 7 and 8 for the following reasons. Number 6 was the right age but his naturalisation and reported arrival were a few years out from that recorded in the 1920 census. JO'K 7 was again the right age but his arrival in 1904 is nearly a decade after my Jeremiah supposedly arrived and after he claimed to have been naturalised. Lastly, JO'K 8 I ruled out because his arrival was even later than number 7's and the 1910 census records him as an alien.

And Finally

There is however another candidate who stands out ahead of all the rest as the likely first husband of Marion Walsh. This Jeremiah arrived with his family aboard the Britannic on 9 August 1895 as per the record in the 1920 census. He was described as 9 years old but later

records establish his birth date as 14 November 1881 making him 35 when he married. He would have been 38 in 1920 and not 37 as the census recorded and 40 at his death and not 36 as death index records but I am not overly concerned by these discrepancies. In any event the census age and the age at death can't both be right, and I would argue they were each off the mark.

There are 1900, 1905, 1910 and 1915 census records for this man. In 1915 he was living with his sister and brother-in-law at 310 East 70th Street, working as a waiter. In earlier censuses his occupation was variously given as a steward in an hotel, a waiter and labourer. At his naturalisation he was described as a waiter while his witness was the Hotel Proprietor Patrick Higgins – his employer? I think this record of employment is consistent with him being an hotel clerk in 1920.

What I believe is most compelling is that this Jeremiah, like that in the 1920 census, arrived in 1895 and was naturalised a US citizen in 1903. This Jeremiah was living with his sister in 1915 but in 1920 he was not with her on census night, and I can find no other documents to suggest he had an alternate future to that of marrying Marion in 1917.

Therefore, given the match in dates for arrival and naturalisation, the proximity in recorded ages, his history of working in the hotel industry and the absence of any documents suggesting otherwise I have concluded that Marion's first husband was Jeremiah born 1881 in Ireland, the son of Jeremiah and Honorah O'Keefe.

As ever I am grateful for all those who publish their research on Ancestry.com from which much of the above is drawn. I am also happy to be corrected on any of the above or to be pointed in the direction of any evidence or documents of which I may not be aware. Just drop me a line.

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