

Dear Craighs,

That's right. That the way our name is spelled, or at least it was until sometime in the 1870's. More on that later.

The day after my last message was sent, Pop's wife Catherine O'Brien Cray's (I'll call her 'Grandma Pop" from here on in) death certificate arrived. It had been filled out by Pop.

It listed Bridget O'Brien as her mother (born in Ireland) and John O'Brien as her father (born in Ireland). It said Catherine was born in Nashua, New Hampshire. It also said she had lived in the town of her death for 32 years. That would have made her 25 when she moved to McKeesport.

The 1880 Census has a John O'Brien, 39, working in a boiler shop, father and mother born in Ireland. He was married to Bridget, 38, mother and father both born in Ireland.

The kids were John, 13; Mary, 7; Kate, 5; and Thomas, 2. All four said their parents were born in Ireland. This is probably a direct hit. If so it also indicates that Bridget and Mary were both Fitzgeralds by coincidence and were not related. I may yet be able to clear Pop and Catherine's names. Shame on those of us who believed those nasty incest rumors!

Yesterday I made a trip to Brady's Bend. I didn't meet Father Ditto, but schmoozing Frances was an easy task. (You knew it would be for a Cray) Actually, Frances was a very nice lady and was very helpful. I must digress here and tell or remind you of an old story.

On July 3, 1976, all of my siblings were in town for the first time in many years. Therefore we had a picnic at my camp in Watersonville on the Allegheny River.

Just prior to the reunion, I had discovered that Father Murphy, a former pastor in Irwin and a dear old friend of Daddy, had been transferred to St. Patrick's Church in Brady's Bend. I called Fr. Murphy and invited him to come to our reunion and he accepted.

I remember the irony of the fact that I was to pick him up after his last mass by boat at the docks of the Crystal Bar (my favorite hangout) in East Brady. This was 8 miles from my camp. (Talk about two worlds coming together on that dock that day.) Anyway, I told Daddy was leaving by boat to pick up his surprise by boat and he asked me if it was a big fish - a pretty close analogy. Well, it was quite a reunion and Daddy and Fr. Murphy spent most of the day sitting in lawn chairs on a big pontoon boat, just chugging up and down the river. It was a great day for all of us, until Daddy went home and died watching TV that night. Of course, it was the biggest shock of our lives, but in retrospect, who could ask for a better day for your last day on earth?

Father Murphy felt horrible.

However, a month later he called me and offered to say a mass at my camp for Daddy, and he did. He was a great friend and a terrific priest.

Well, after I told this story to Frances and the others at the St. Patrick's, it was all over. They loved Fr. Murphy as much as my family did and they couldn't have been nicer to me. She still wasn't allowed to let me into the records, but I hired a young girl named Tricia to do the research for me (I have yet to walk into a Catholic church when at some point I didn't need my wallet.)

Now for the preliminary findings! Tricia found 4 Baptism Certificates of Pop's siblings:

Catherine Craigh, born 7/15/1863
Michael Craigh born 12/18/1864
Peter Craigh, born 3/4/1866
John Craigh, born 2/25/1870

Mother and father are listed as John Craigh and Mary Fitzgerald (this is the first time Mary and Fitzgerald have appeared together. If you remember Uncle Joe had mistakenly listed Bridget on the death certificate, and she was listed as Mary Cray on the 1880 census.

The only other piece of valuable information was the listing of the godparents. Most are names that don't mean anything. However, Catherine's godmother was Margaret Craigh and Michael's godfather was James Craigh, both likely relatives of John Craigh. This info could help tremendously down the road.

Not a bad day's work! Having the correct last name is sure a big help to any genealogy search. The bad news is that I went back to Armstrong county courthouse and was still unable to find the Craigh name anywhere. I searched births, deaths, marriages, deeds, and leases. Nothing! I found some Fitzgeralds, but nothing for either a Bridget or Mary. Those Craighs never went to the courthouse - only to church. Some Crays today are just the opposite.

Some interesting points or questions:

We know now that they were living in Brady's Bend as far back as 1863. We know the name change came after 1870, but before 1880 (where it was "Cray" on the census)
Why would a couple at that stage of their lives change their names? John was over 55 with at least 4 kids. What would suddenly cause him to change names? I'd like to figure that one out!
How early did they come over? The godparents' presence would indicate they were here for a while, or that they all came over together.

Well, let's hope Tricia can come up with some more good stuff.

Love,
Bob

PS You probably ought to draw up a little family tree chart. This stuff can get awfully confusing. I'd send you one, but my computer skills are limited to text.