

Keeping the Kearneys in contact across the years, across the seas

The letter reproduced below shows the ongoing contact between four first cousins from different ends of the world—Scotland, New Jersey USA, and New Zealand—just on a century after Sarah Kearney had emigrated from County Donegal in Ireland to New Zealand. The four cousins were grandchildren of Edward and Annie Kearney of Donegal, whose 17 children included Andrew, Sarah (married Charlie Dougherty), Annie (married Bill O'Donnell) and Willie.

In 1984, Bill O'Donnell's wife Jean reached out to Lizzie Rooney in Glasgow for the addresses of relatives in New Zealand, hoping that Jean's grandson could visit relatives in New Zealand during his US Navy posting to Antarctica (the McMurdo Sound base is serviced from Christchurch NZ). Jean then wrote to Sarah Tohill in Wellington (daughter of Sarah Kearney), as well as to Cathy Ryan in Hamilton NZ (daughter of Andrew Carney).¹

A copy of the letter to Sarah Tohill was passed on to her nephew John O'Neill in Dunedin NZ, where the whole family (if I may speak for them) was excited by the prospect of a visiting cousin from the United States. However, no visit eventuated, although I think a letter may have been sent to the grandson's US Navy address. A year later, in mid-1985, John O'Neill visited Lizzie Rooney in Glasgow, and obtained from her the only list of the 17 Kearney/Carney children.

Around 2008, on successive visits from Australia to New Zealand, I searched meticulously at 6 City Road, Dunedin, my childhood home, for this letter, without success (there was a *lot* of paper at home; over 100 boxes have been donated to the Hocken Library). Then in 2009 I found a photocopy of the letter in my own original 1970s genealogy folder. I tried to email a copy to Jean's daughter Elaine Williams in New Jersey in 2010, but our indirect email contact was not reliable. I am now finally editing the letter properly in 2020, having just made email contact with Jean's granddaughter Sheila Gallimore-Griffin of Austin TX—just as in 1984, the link has been remade through a third country, this time via Hugh Doherty of Letterkenny, Co. Donegal.

The relationship tree below illustrates the relationships involved in this roundabout story!

Patrick N. O'Neill
Canberra, Australia
24 January 2020

¹ The story of why some of the 17 children ended up with their surname spelt Carney and others with their surname spelt Kearney is for another day.

116, 16th St
Suff City, N.J. 08008
May 4th 1984

My Dear Sarah,

I am Jean O'Donnell, married to Bill O'Donnell, who's mother was Anne Keane O'Donnell, who would be ~~sister~~ to your mother ^{sister}. Correct me if I am wrong, anyway, Bill & I have a grandson, at this time in "McMurdo, in Antarctica", will be back in New Zealand in October, before returning to the States.

Lizzie Rooney in Glasgow Scotland, sent me the address's, but not in time before the boy left here, I wrote to Cathy Ryan in NZ, & now I'm writing to you, I'm hoping you'll be able to meet him in Oct, what a thrill that would be for Bill, Lizzie has told us when the folks from NZ, were visiting her, & how Bill wished he'd been there.

Our grandson's name is

Walter William

U.S. Navy Supp. Force

Det, McMurdo.

Antarctica

He is our middle girl Elaine's son, so we're hoping he can meet some of you when he gets back to NZ.

Bill & I have been married 57 yrs, he is 83, I am 79, both enjoy good health, raised four children, Terrence the oldest, Jean Anne, Elaine & Sheila our youngest.

2
We have sixteen grand children & one great-grandson, who we have enjoyed watching grow up, we've been retired over ten years, & enjoy the quiet life, we are blessed with loving & caring children, have our own home, & manage just fine.

I'm hoping I will hear from you or Cathy, we send our love & best wishes to all,

Sincerely

(Mrs Wm) Jean O'Donnell

PS

Sarah, I'm enclosing a picture of Walter, he's a nice boy, red hair & six feet tall

Walter Williams is probably the grandson of Annie Keane, who was Sarah Daugherty Keane's sister. !C.

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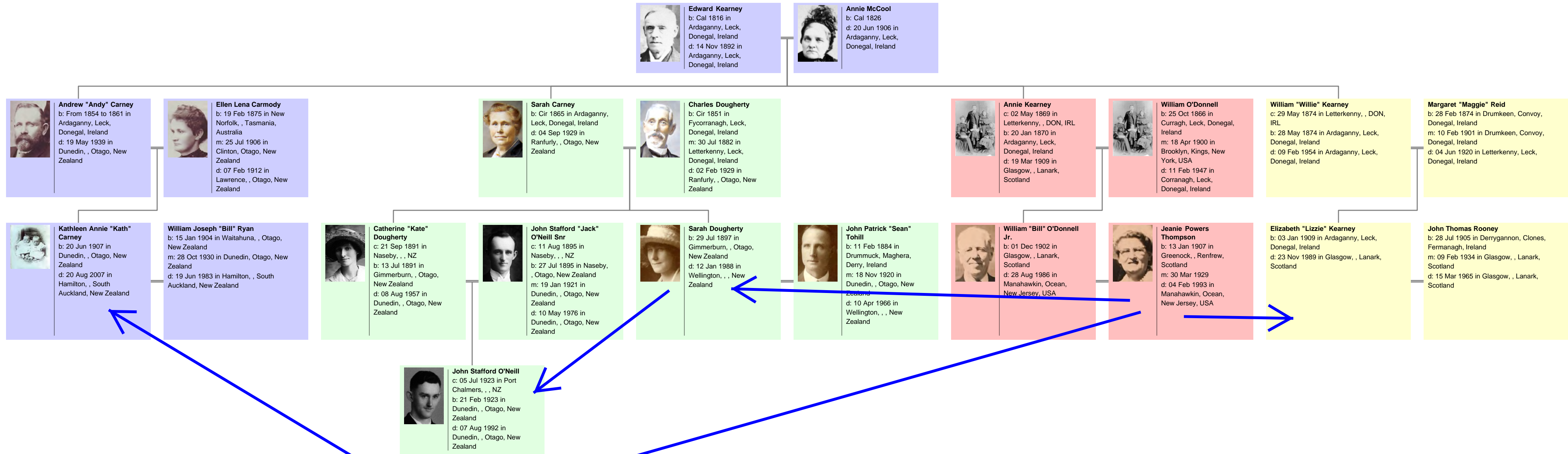
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Annotation probably by Sarah Tohill's son Patrick:

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Ed. note: Walter Williams is actually the great-grandson of Annie O'Donnell née Kearney.

Selected Descendants of Edward Kearney and Annie née McCool



Arrows indicate the direction of correspondence. Only the letter to Sarah Tohill is extant.