

# Ronald Reagan Presidential Library

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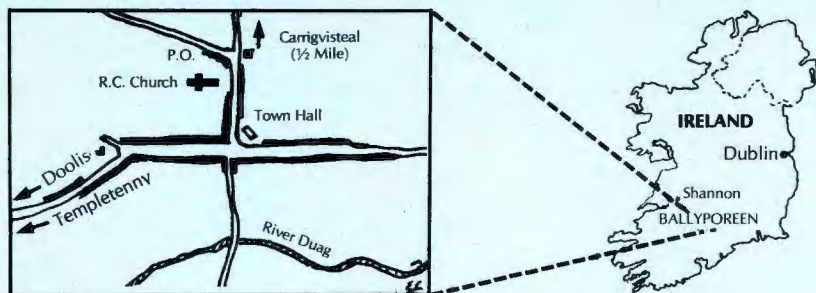
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*Last Updated: 05/22/2024*



# Sinsearaí Éireannaí an Uachtaráin Ragnall Ó Riagáin

## The Irish Ancestry of President Ronald Reagan



### Names in the Templetenny Baptismal Register

There are over 40,000 names in the 1817-1872 Templetenny Baptismal Register. Each Baptismal entry includes six names: the child's name, the father's name, the mother's maiden name, two godparents' names, and the name of the officiating Priest. It might be of service to list some of the surnames, for instance the ones which appear on the same two pages as the entry for Michael Regan.

They are:

Fox	Mahony	Roache
Regan	Keating	Cleary
Sisk	Tobin	*Dunohoo
Beston	Cull	Thornill
O'Brien	Cahil	Brenan
Murphy	Burns	Carew
Walsh	Gorman	Casey
Kenny	McGrath	Driscoll
Kent	Hally	Creed

Other names which occur frequently are:

Ahern	Fitzgerald	O'Neill
Begley	Hennessy	Prendergast
Bourke	Kearney	Russell
Brady	Kiely	Ryan
Condon	O'Donnell	Williams

\*phonetic spelling.

### A Note for those interested in Ancestry Research

It has been said that those who do not treasure up the memory of their ancestors do not deserve to be remembered by posterity. Interest in tracing one's ancestry has strongly increased in the latter part of this century, partly owing to the remarkable success of the Alex Haley "Roots" saga.

Tracing ancestors who emigrated obviously poses particular problems. It cannot be overstressed that the main requirement in such a situation is to do exhaustive research first of all in the country of destination. An American, for instance, trying to trace Irish ancestors should do as much research as possible in the United States before attempting to do any tracing in Ireland.

The memories of elderly relatives should be drawn on and documented. It may be known that a grandfather died in 1912 aged 78 years. Now one has an approximate date of birth in 1834, and so on. Marriage documents are often available and can be a valuable source of information. The maiden name of the mother is always useful in searching for birth records.

For those wishing to pursue research in Ireland (or elsewhere in Europe) probably the most effective method is to engage a professional company to undertake a search. The fees charged are quite reasonable and the chances of success much greater than a private researcher will have.

For example, in Ireland many of the oldest surviving records are in Catholic parishes, under the care of priests. These men very often simply do not have the time to pursue exhaustive searches through their books. The Templetenny Baptismal Register, as illustrated, underlines the difficulties (e.g. the names are not arranged in

columns, they are in Latin and very often they are difficult to read). However, these old registers are available on micro-film at a central location in Dublin. The professional will work from there, often thereby saving time and money. It must be repeated that the chances of success will be greatly enhanced if the person seeking roots has already put together every scrap of information which can be gleaned from sources in the country of residence. The writer of this memoir has had a request for information on a person for whom even the century of birth was not provided by the correspondent!

It is worth pointing out that it was through the work of professional researchers that the ancestry of President Ronald Reagan was traced back through five generations to Thomas Regan, of Doolis, Ballyporeen.

\*Debrett's Irish Ancestry Service in conjunction with Hibernian Research Co. Ltd.

The author acknowledges the valuable assistance received from Paddy Derivan, Bord Fáilte; Jean Rylands, American Embassy, Dublin; Hugh Peskett of Debretts; Fr. John Kiely and Martin Sheridan.

Photograph of the Church of the Assumption, Ballyporeen: Paddy O'Dea, BFE. Colour separations by Graphic Reproductions Ltd. Photosetting by Ree-Pro Ltd., Dublin. Printed by Graphic Printers Ltd., Dublin. Design: Donal Gilligan, MSDI.

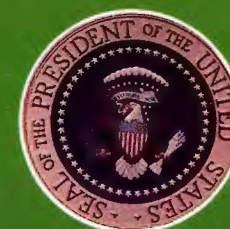
This is an official publication of the Parish of Ballyporeen: John Murphy, Pastor. Any profits that may accrue will be used for parish development.

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# Sinsearaí Éireannaí an Uachtaráin Ragnall Ó Riagáin



## The Irish Ancestry of President Ronald Reagan





## The Irish Ancestry of President Ronald Reagan



The White House, Washington, D.C.



The Presidential Seal.



Official Seal of Ballyporeen Parish.



Church of the Assumption, Ballyporeen.

Sinsearacht Éireannaic  
an Uachtaráin  
Ragnall Ó Riagáin

## The Link with Ballyporeen

The Irish ancestry of Ronald Reagan, President of the United States of America, and of his brother Neil was established by researchers from Debrett's Peerage Ltd., England. Using standard methods of research, they traced the Reagan roots back to his great-great-grandfather, one Thomas Regan, of Doolis, Ballyporeen, Co. Tipperary.

Most people have little trouble in tracing their ancestry to their grandparents. Either they know them personally in which case there is no problem, or if they are dead older relatives will remember them. Ronald Reagan's grandfather was called John Regan; he died in Fulton, Illinois, in 1889. Using available written records, among them the American census of 1860, it was possible to trace John Regan's parents' marriage to England in 1852 and to find the record of his own birth in London on 4th June 1854.

John Regan was the son of Michael Regan, who had married Catherine Mulcahy on 31st October 1852 in Southwark, South London. The English census of 30th March 1851 listed Michael Regan as being aged 21 and a native of Co. Tipperary, Ireland.

Further research in Ireland revealed that he had been born in Doolis, Ballyporeen, Co. Tipperary, and was baptised in the Roman Catholic church at Ballyporeen on 3rd September 1829. He was the youngest son of Thomas Regan and Margaret Murphy, of Doolis. The records went back no further.

The link with Ballyporeen was officially recognised on St. Patrick's Day (17 March) 1981 when Ireland's Minister for Finance presented to President Ronald Reagan, on behalf of the Government of Ireland, a genealogical chart tracing the President's ancestors to Ballyporeen.

## The Parish Records of Ballyporeen

A parish is a district within a diocese, under the care of a pastor. The parish of Ballyporeen is part of the Diocese of Waterford and Lismore, and forms the north-western boundary of the ancient Irish kingdom of the Déise (pronounced *day-sha*).

Roman Catholic parishes always keep records of Baptisms and Marriages; sometimes records of other church events are also kept. Few parish records in Ireland go back before 1800. For much of the 18th century, the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland was oppressed by Penal Laws, and persecuted Churches tend not to keep records. The laws were eventually relaxed and were finally repealed in 1829.

The Registers of Ballyporeen Parish for Baptisms and Marriages begin in 1817. At that time the parish was known as Templetenny, the name changing to Ballyporeen towards the end of the last century. Accordingly, the Baptismal Register for 1829 is in fact the Templetenny Baptismal Register, the first volume covering 1817-1872.

## Explanation of Text

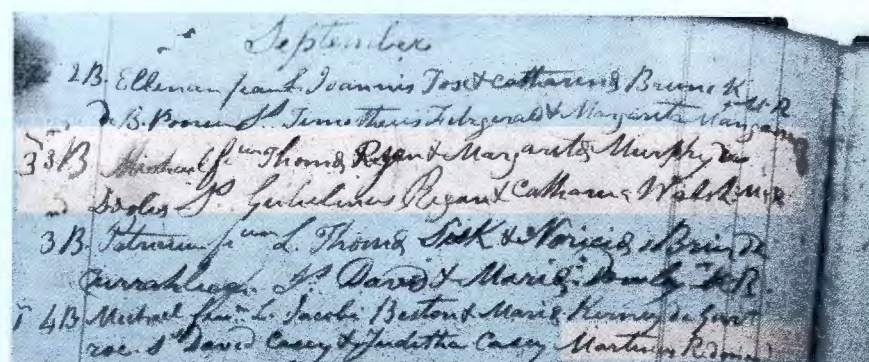
Roman Catholic parishes have traditionally kept their official records in Latin. Thus, in old registers words like 'Baptism', 'son of', and first names appear in Latin; surnames and place-names are in English. In an apparent effort to use paper sparingly, Latin abbreviations were commonly used, e.g. 'Ss' for the Latin word 'Suscipientibus' meaning those who take on the duty of godparents. The entries were always made by priests, writing with quill pens; the ink was a mixture of black powder and water. Different mixes of ink had different lasting properties, so on a particular page in an old register the entries for a few days may be crystal clear, followed by badly faded ones. We are concerned with lines 3 and 4 at the top of the left-hand page. (The first '3' with the symbol over it, is at present unexplained). It reads as follows, in Latin, with the abbreviated words enclosed in brackets:

3 B(a)ptizavi Michael fi(li)um Thomae Regan  
et Margaritae Murphy de Doolis  
S(uscipientibu)s Gulielmus Regan et Catharina Walsh M+R.

In English, that would read:

On the 3rd I Baptised: Michael, son of Thomas Regan  
and Margaret Murphy of Doolis;  
Godparents: William Regan and Catharine Walsh M+R

The "M+R" was the signature of the Priest who performed the ceremony of Baptism. On some entries he signed his full name, Martin Redmond; if there was less room he signed as M. Redmond; if there was little or no room, he used M+R. (See the end of the eighth line for his full signature "Martinus Redmond").



## Reagan — Regan — O'Regan

In 1829 the people of the Parish of Templetenny were basically speakers of the Irish language, sometimes known as Gaelic. In that language, most surnames have an "O" prefix. Some names retain the "O" in English, some do not — Irish people themselves are not very consistent on this matter to the present day. For example, five of the six children of Thomas Regan and Margaret Murphy of Doolis, are listed in the Templetenny Baptismal Register. In three of the entries the father is called "Regan", in the other two "O'Regan".

There was a tendency at the time to spell phonetically — to spell a word the same way as it sounds. (Americans tend to spell phonetically, so "colour" in English usage, becomes "color" in American).

The Gaelic form of Regan is "Ó Riagáin" (pronounced O'Ree-gawn); it was sometimes spelled as "Ó Réagáin" (O'Ray-gawn). It is therefore a natural development to find Irish-speaking Michael Regan spelling his surname as "Reagan" in the marriage register at Southwark, London; subsequently he and his descendants retained the Reagan spelling.

To show that the spellings were interchangeable in the usage of the time, the same people are sometimes named in the Templetenny Baptismal Register as "Regan" and at other times "Reagan", and these entries were made by highly educated priests.

## The Townland of Doolis

Doolis is a townland of 229 acres, situated about three miles west of the village of Ballyporeen. A "townland" in Ireland is a small territorial unit, useful for identifying the location of a place in agricultural land. The name Doolis is a corruption of the Gaelic "Dubhlios" (pronounced Dhuv-liss), meaning "dark fairy-fort". The townland of Doolis is now uninhabited farmland.

In the 1830s, before the great Famine of the next decade, Doolis had many families; in 1841 it had a population of 129 people. The houses of poor labourers like Thomas Regan would have been constructed of mud and wattles. When they were later abandoned, the rain would simply have washed them back into the soil. No trace would remain.

## Templetenny Graveyard

The graveyard surrounding the ruined church of Templetenny is presumed to be the burial ground of the Regan family of Doolis. It would be quite extraordinary if it were not since Doolis is less than half-a-mile away from the cemetery. None of the existing tombstones seems to have been erected by the Regan family, which may be for either of two reasons. A poor family, which they were, may not have had a tombstone at all; or else, since the family left the area for America, an untended tombstone may gradually have sunk beneath the surface, as many others have done.

An annual Mass is celebrated in the graveyard for the repose of the souls of all those buried there.

## The Ruined Church of Templetenny

Templetenny, "the Church of the Marsh", contains the ruins of an old church building and a graveyard. The precise age of the church is unknown, but it clearly goes back several centuries since it had fallen into disuse by the mid-1700s.

The modern-day Church of the Assumption in Ballyporeen village was built in 1828. Michael Regan would have been among the first to be baptised there a year later, and the family of Thomas Regan would have walked to Mass there from Doolis every Sunday. The church today serves a parish population of about 1,400; in the 1840s the parishioners numbered over 5,000.

Before 1828, the people worshipped in a small thatched-roofed church in Carrigvisteal, about half-a-mile north of Ballyporeen. Before that again, there was an era when they would not have been allowed to have any church, during which time Templetenny Church fell into ruins.

In earlier times, the church in Templetenny was the centre of worship for the district, probably for centuries, and the dead of the area were buried there. It is sacred ground.



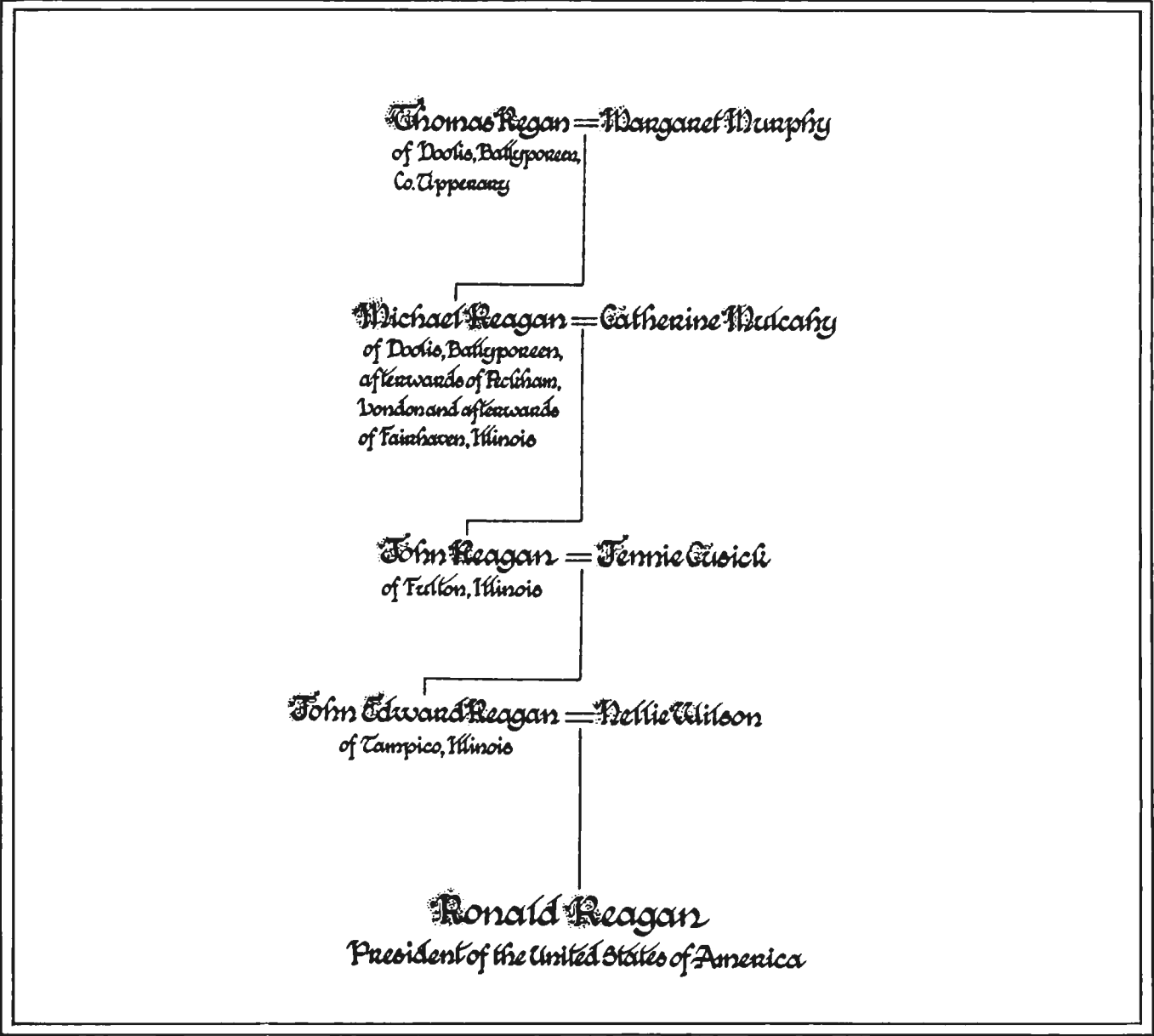
The Family of Thomas Regan of Doolis

Thomas Regan, a labourer, was married to Margaret Murphy sometime prior to 1817. They had six children, three boys and three girls: Nicholas, born before 1817; Ellen (b. 1819), John (b. 1821), Margaret (b. 1823), Elizabeth (b. 1826) and Michael (b. 1829).

Nicholas, the eldest, accompanied his youngest brother Michael to London, where he was a witness at Michael's marriage to Catherine Mulcahy in 1852. The marriage certificate mentioned that the father, Thomas, was by now deceased. Both Nicholas and John later worked for their brother Michael in Fairhaven, Illinois, and apparently never married.

The subsequent history of the three girls, who presumably remained in Ireland and married, is unknown at present.

Sinsearaí Éireannaí  
an Uachtaráin  
Ragnall Ó Riagáin



The Irish Ancestry  
of President Ronald Reagan

The pedigree above, derived from research carried out by  
Debra's Irish Ancestry Service, has been recorded in Volume 29,  
folio 46 of the series of Registered Pedigrees preserved in this Office.

Genealogical Office,  
Dublin Castle

Baron Quinn  
Chief Herald  
6 March 1981

Overleaf: A facsimile of facing pages in the  
Baptismal Register of Templetenny — later  
Ballyporeen — Parish for 1829. The  
Baptism of Michael Reagan, President  
Reagan's great-grandfather is recorded in  
lines 3 and 4 on the left-hand page.

Reagan family tree, courtesy of the Editor,  
Ireland Today, Bulletin of the Department  
of Foreign Affairs, Dublin.

Colour transparency of facsimile pages:  
Beryl Stone



September

- 2B. Ellena f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
B. Pomer f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
3B. Michael f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
3B. Peter f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
4B. Ellena f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
4B. Michael f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
5B. Ellena f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
7B. Ellena f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R

- 11B. Ellena f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
13B. Margaret f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
13B. Michael f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
15B. Judith f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
25B. Michael f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
25B. Ellena f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
30B. Peter f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R

October 5 - 1729

October 5 - 1729

- 2B. Elizabeth f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
5B. Margaret f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
6B. Ellena f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
10B. Michael f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
10B. Ellena f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
11B. Michael f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
17B. Ellena f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
18B. Michael f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
25B. Ellena f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
25B. Michael f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
25B. Judith f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R

- November 1 - 1729
- 10B. Ellena f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
30B. Michael f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
B. Joannis f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
8B. Jacob f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R  
9B. David f. an L. Joannis Tost & Catharina Braun R



THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

*Bill Harkel*

TO: Mike ~~Deaver~~ / Bill Sittmann

FROM: KATHY OSBORNE  
Personal Secretary  
to the President

DATE: 3-12-84

FYI

ON MARCH 17, the more than 42 million Americans who can claim roots in Ireland's past, along with those who wish they could, will gather to celebrate the Wearing of the Green and their ties to the Olde Sod. Among the many fascinated by the details of their own family history is the president's son.

By RON REAGAN

WHEN I WAS eight or nine, my father told me that the name Reagan was Irish and this, among other things, was what we were.

Very slowly, and only as I grew older, did I become interested in my family's history.

My curiosity quickened when Debrett's, the genealogical tracing organization in England, provided my father with the paternal side of his family tree. Here at last were names attached to real people, confirmed dates of lifetimes and, frustrating at the time, actual places to visit. Naturally when the opportunity finally arose to travel to Ireland, I was more than eager.

The story I unearthed is brief but intriguing. Early in the 1800's in a small township called Doolis, three miles west of the slightly larger Ballyporeen in County Tipperary, a young man named Thomas Regan married a woman named Margaret Murphy.

Between 1816 and 1829 they had six children. The youngest, a son, they named Michael. In the late 40's or early 50's, at the height of the potato famine, Michael left for England, where his name was changed to Reagan, and married a Tipperary girl, Catherine Mulcahy.

Gathering up their family, including second son John, they moved to America in 1858, reaching Illinois via the St. Lawrence River and Canada. John, married to Jennie Cusick, died young in a farming accident but not before fathering one daughter and two sons. John and Jennie's youngest son was John Edward, became a shoe salesman and married Nellie Wilson. Their youngest son, my father born in 1911, was named Ronald.

On my journey to explore the beginnings of this genealogical record, my wife Doria and I flew over Ireland's western coast.

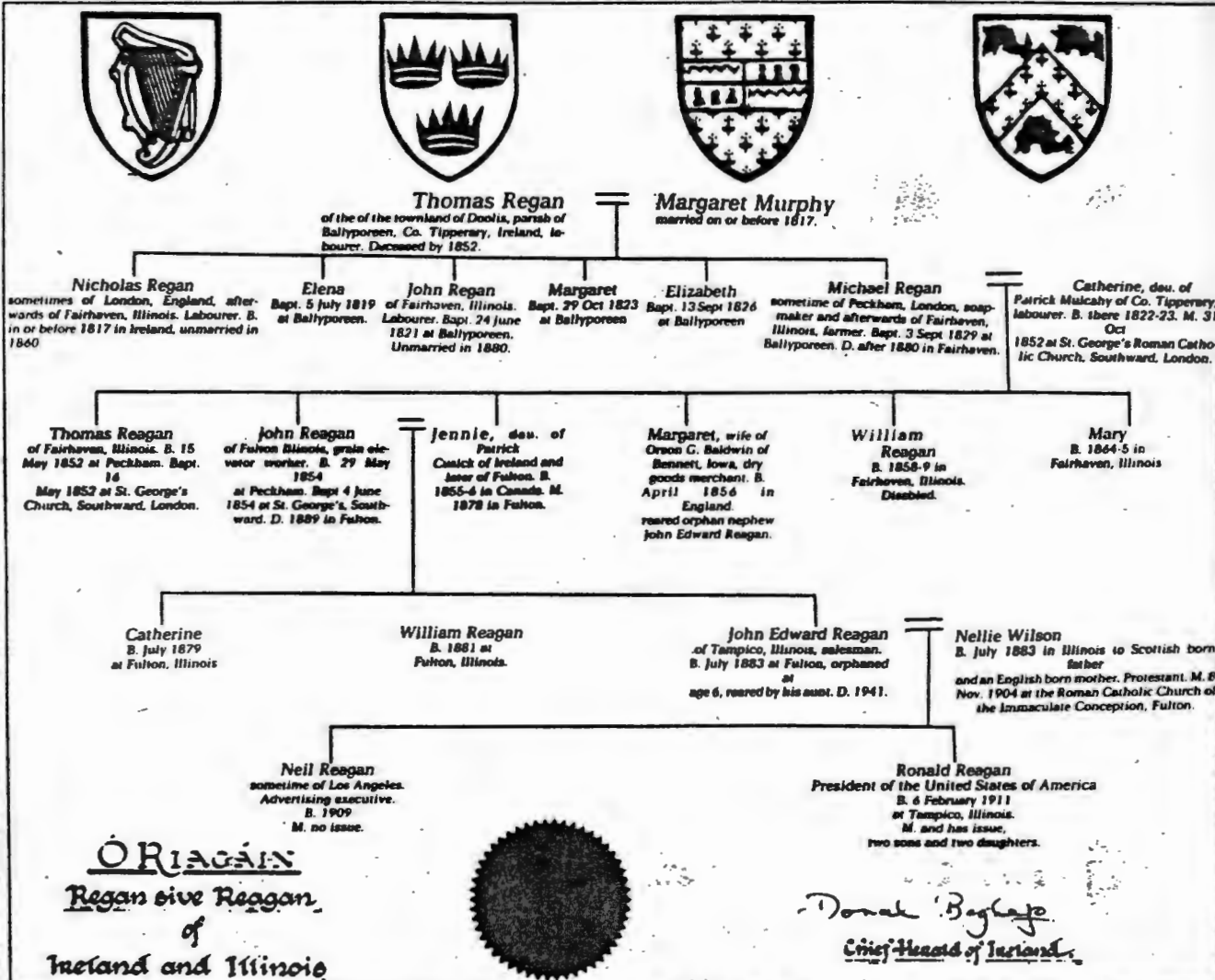
Our first stop was with Tom Lindert, who researched the Irish bough of my family tree for Debrett's.

Well-kept records (birth and death certificates, marriage licenses, etc.) in Illinois leave a clear paper trail leading from my father to his father, his grandfather and eventually to Michael Regan.

U.S. census data and an Illinois death certificate indicate my great-great-grandfather Michael was born in Ireland, had three children in England,

Chasing your own Irish roots? See Travel, page 36.

# Ron Reagan traces presidential family tree



came to America in 1858 and had two more children.

From there, the research jumps the Atlantic. Michael's age and county of birth, Tipperary, turn up in an English census, and English General Registration records tell us he married Catherine Mulcahy, seven years his senior, on October 31, 1852, in St. George's Catholic Church, London. The wedding ceremony took place five and a half months after the delivery of their first son.

At this point, names become important. It is Irish tradition to name the first son and daughter after their paternal grandparents. Michael and Catherine named theirs Thomas and Margaret. Therefore, when the trail crossed the channel into Ireland and dropped into Tom Lindert's lap, he knew what to look for: Michael Regan, born 1829 or 1830 in County Tipperary of

parents Thomas and Margaret.

The Tithe Applotment, compiled between 1824 and 1830, and Griffith's Valuation of the 1830's and 1840's, both housed in Dublin's National Library, are the most complete records of tax-paying Irish householders from that era. The former reveals nine Catholic parishes in Tipperary containing Regans but only one, in Ballyporeen, lists a Michael born at the right time.

Baptismal records in the trust of the parish curate, Father Eanna Condon, show him christened on September 3, 1829, by parents — you guessed it — Thomas and Margaret. His brothers and sisters are listed as well, excepting eldest brother Nicholas, who was baptized before the records were started in 1817.

Can my family be traced further back? Lindert is skeptical. In the

18th and 19th centuries, and certainly before, Ireland's populace was not regularly surveyed. Records undertaken, often concerning taxes paid to English landlords, did not always survive.

Months of painstaking research may have turned up further clues — unfortunately, this time we must satisfy ourselves with a trip to the homeland, Ballyporeen, and a look at the Father Condon's baptismal record.

The book is remarkably well preserved. What were once loose leaves were bound in leather around 1890 by a resident priest. The pages are yellow, the ink faded, but Father Martin Redmond's Latin script still reaches us from 1829 — "Michael filium Thomas Regan et Margaret Murphy de Doolis."

Holding this book, I am as close as I will come to touching the lives of my Irish ancestors.



The young Ronald Reagan, in white suit, with parents and brother Neil in a 1913 family photo taken in Tampico, Ill. Reagan passed along his respect of his Irish heritage to his own children.

With Father Condon as guide, we tour the countryside around Ballyporeen. We slow down near a field indistinguishable from its neighbors except by a large tree in the near corner.

Here, Father Condon explains, a thatched-roof

church once stood. It burned down in the 1820's but in its time, Thomas Regan's time, it served the surrounding communities. Almost certainly this was where Thomas married Margaret. Judging by its size, the magnificently

spreading tree was a sapling on that wedding day over 167 years ago. Today, not a cornerstone of the old chapel remains. Of all the places we've visited, this, for me, holds the greatest fascination.

(c) 1984, Ron Reagan. Distributed by the Los Angeles Times Syndicate.



# A TOUCH OF THE GREEN IN THE WHITE HOUSE

by

JACK McCARTHY



On a biting, blustery Irish afternoon last December I was chatting in a remote Donegal seaside pub with Paddy Joe, its affable knowledgeable owner, about the election of Ronald Reagan to the U.S. presidency. In the course of our talk, I casually commented that a number of American politicians were of Irish extraction.

"Aye, you mean your presidents", publican Paddy Joe promptly corrected me.

Before I could get a word in edgewise, he was counting off no less than a dozen U.S. presidents of Irish origin. Besides, he was naming the respective Irish counties from which their ancestors had emigrated to the States.

Paddy Joe's presidential list included Ronald Reagan (Co. Tipperary), Jimmy Carter (Antrim), Gerald Rudolph Ford (Cork), Richard Milhous Nixon (Kildare), John Fitzgerald Kennedy (Wexford),

Woodrow Wilson (Derry), William McKinley (Fermanagh), Grover Cleveland (Down), Chester Alan Arthur (Antrim), Ulysses Simpson Grant (Donegal), James Buchanan (Armagh), and Andrew Jackson (Tyrone).

After rattling off his dozen American-Irish presidents, Paddy Joe explained that the ancestors of five of the twelve — those of Reagan, Ford, Nixon, Kennedy and Grant — had come from the 26 counties. Those of the remaining seven — Carter, Wilson, McKinley, Cleveland, Arthur, Buchanan and Jackson — had their roots in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland, "now, as usual, is having everlasting troubles, but is still cozy with imperial Great Britain".

Then Paddy Joe took a quick glance around his pub to see if any of his patrons were listening in on our conversation. Evidently, some were, because he leaned across the bar towards me and in a characteristic

Celtic whisper continued with:

"Of the whole dozen of those Irish presidents of your country that I mentioned, only John Fitzgerald Kennedy — God rest his grand soul — was a Catholic. Mind ye now, I've absolutely nothing against the eleven others because they're not of our Faith. Every one of the eleven, like JFK himself, is a great credit to his Irish forefathers".

According to Paddy Joe, the religious preference of the seven U.S. presidents whose antecedents came from Northern Ireland likely was Presbyterian. For back in the 1640s, when Cromwell invaded Ireland, he created the Northern Ireland plantation by offering land to the Presbyterians in Scotland. They accepted by the hundreds.

"These Scotch Presbyterians who settled in Ulster", said Paddy Joe, "and their descendants down to this day and very hour, have never been over-fond of the Pope".

4/13/82 - from "An Irish magazine"



Recently, while in Belfast en route to the airport, our bus passed through a devastated area where graffiti read: "No Pope Here!" Underneath it, some wag had added: "Lucky Popel".

The knowing Paddy Joe also proudly proclaimed that the present White House, of which the original was burned by the British in the War of 1812, was redesigned and reconstructed by James Hoban, a Catholic architect from Kilkenny. "The man was a perfectionist", Paddy Joe concluded, and "the Reagans will enter the White House as though it was just built".

Perhaps I should have mentioned that an Irish American contractor, John McShain, had made extensive repairs on the White House in the 1940s. But in a remote Donegal pub, one contradicts its publican at the risk of his own health, or worse still, possible bleak banishment from its premises.

Interestingly, one of the larger Irish estates which Cromwell confiscated, he gave to his fellow warrior, Admiral Sir William Penn, the father of William Penn, famed founder of Pennsylvania and a fervent Quaker. In the 1660s, the younger Penn managed his father's estate located in Cork and was instrumental in persuading Quakers from England and elsewhere to settle in Ireland.

President Nixon's Quaker side, the Milhouses, were probably among those who followed Penn to Ireland. While he was still in the White House, Nixon visited the Milhouse family grave in Timahoe, Co. Kildare. His Timahoe hosts presented the president with the gift of an Irish setter. He showed his delight and appreciation by naming the setter Timahoe, and taking the dog back with him to live in the White House.

Incidentally, just about three miles offshore in the Atlantic Ocean from Paddy Joe's pub lies Arranmore Island where President U.S. Grant's forbears came from. A lovely, lively, jolly spot. President Grant's people left Arranmore to go to America in 1630. But any inquiries about them by Yank tourists are invariably answered by the locals as though the Grants left just a month ago.

Strabane is the home-town of President Wilson's ancestors. A great grandfather of Wilson's was an apprentice to Strabane's famed printer, Belknap, who emigrated to Philadelphia in Colonial Days and printed the Declaration of Independence.

According to Debrett's Peerage Limited, the London-based ancestry outfit, President Reagan's great grandfather, Michael Reagan, was born in 1829 in Doolis, a tiny hamlet,

now uninhabited, outside the town of Ballyporeen, Co. Tipperary. Michael was baptized in the Catholic Church of Ballyporeen, which still has baptismal records. On those Church records, Michael's father's name appears as "O'Regan and Regan". During the great Irish famine of the 1840s, Michael moved to London where he married Katherine Mulcahy from Co. Tipperary. In 1858 he emigrated to America and took up farming in Illinois.

Like nearly all the Irish, the president, according to Debrett's, is related to one of the many legendary ancient Celtic kings. His royal ancestor is Brian Boru. Shortly after the presidential election, John O'Farrell, a longtime publican in Ballyporeen, named a lounge after his cousin, the new president of the United States.

Above the door of the lounge is a 16-foot long lighted sign that bears the Reagan royal Irish crest and proclaims "The Ronald Reagan" in huge green Gaelic lettering. "It fits in perfectly", says cousin O'Farrell proudly of his sign.

After reading of the grand opening of cousin O'Farrell's Reagan lounge, Paddy Joe dourly predicted: "Aye, now that Ron Reagan is in the White House, he'll soon be discovering that he has many, many Irish relatives whom he never knew existed before".

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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

Date: 1/25/84

To: Kathy Osborne

Here is my Irish file. Also, as we previously discussed, Fr. Eanna Condon (who put together the Ballyporeen brochure) is to be avoided. When he came to the W.H. a couple of years ago, a few of us in this office had lunch with him. God forgive me, I mean no disrespect to the clergy, but this guy is a rootin-tootin hustler and self promoter. "Nuff said.

KATHERINE SHEPHERD  
Presidential Correspondence  
Office  
Room 98, x7610





## Michael Reagan Puts Down Roots in Illinois

by IMHOFF LAURITSEN

Michael Reagan, the greatgrandfather of President Ronald Reagan, was the migrant pioneer who brought this branch of the family to America. He was part of a great movement that was to enrich America's growth brought about by the endurance, strength and courage of those who took part in the great Irish migration to the New World.

Michael was baptised 18 December 1829, according to his baptismal record written in Latin in the Ballyporeen Catholic Church in the southwest of County Tipperary in Ireland. The Topographical Dictionary of Ireland identified Ballyporeen as a village in the barony of Iffa and Offa West in County Tipperary. Its Catholic parish was in the Diocese of Waterford and Lismore. Baptismal records first appeared in the parish register in 1817.

Michael's father was Thomas O'Regan, a laborer, who had married Margaret Murphy in or before 1817. Thomas appeared in both "Regan" and O'Regan" in the church records kept by Father Condon. Thomas had died by 1852.

Michael was the youngest of six children appearing in the baptismal records:



Nicholas born in or before 1817  
Elena baptised 5 July 1819  
John baptised 24 June 1821  
Margaret baptised 29 October 1823  
Elizabeth baptised 13 September 1826  
Michael baptised 3 September 1829

The family was poor and landless, and since Catholics were forbidden, by the laws formulated by Edmund Burke in England, to live within five miles of a corporate town, they lived in the area of Doolis, a small community just west of Ballyporeen. The area, below the Galtee Mountains, was damp and unimpressive, and is now largely uninhabited, "a tangle of briar and bog" where cattle graze.

#### CONDITIONS IN IRELAND

In Ireland, the labor of children was important on the large farms owned by English and Irish landlords, and the Catholic Church encouraged large families. Growth of the population had led to a critical ratio of land per person, in a country highly dependent on agriculture.

The families of the poor living on the great estates, increased the political power of the landowners, who controlled the votes of their tenants. Open ballots made it impossible for a man to conceal how he had voted, and a displeased landlord could at will deprive any tenant of his livelihood.

Wealthy Irish and English landowners were not in touch with the miseries of the poor and had contempt for their apparent ignorance and backwardness. The owners were often absent from their estates which were run by managers who, for their own gain, exploited the tenants, as well as getting as much as possible for the owners. The poor relied on land for their survival, renting minute plots which could easily be taken from them since laws favored the land owners. If the poor tenant could not pay his rent, the owner could not only deprive him of his land but could also take his livestock, what-



## *The Invincible Irish*

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ever small crops he might be growing, or anything else he  
might have of value.

To keep his cattle from being stolen, the peasant would  
take them into his rude cottage at night where they would  
occupy half of the room while the family slept on the floor  
at the other end on straw or rushes.

An on-the-scene description of life in Doolis was written  
by William O'Brien, who became a Westminster member of  
parliament from North Cork. He wrote of a Widow Conlon,  
who would have been a neighbor of the O'Regan family and  
described a "starved-looking and half-naked old woman, bare-  
footed and shivering with age and pain." Her cabin gave him  
"an impression of sickness and horror that fills me with loath-  
ing. . . . The unfortunate creature had built it herself of sods  
and stones and bits of timber were fastened against the walls  
here and there to prevent it from falling to pieces. An iron  
pot was the entire furniture. There were stones for seats, a  
mound of wild plants for a bedstead. The approaches to the  
house were swimming in liquid manure and mud."

Even if it had been within his means, there was little in-  
centive for the peasant to improve his home since at any time  
the landlord could move him out of it.

The standard of living among the poor had always been  
low in Ireland but it reached disaster after potatoes became  
the principal agricultural product. The blight of the potato  
that caused crop failure actually began in 1845, and in 1847,  
the crop failed for the third consecutive year, this time total-  
ly. The resulting famine caused the largest movement of  
migration from Ireland to that time. Among those who could  
not leave, the survivors were so weakened and helpless that  
they could scarcely attend to the dead, who were buried in  
trenches or left to lie where they fell. No accurate account  
could be kept of either deaths or departures, but millions  
died of starvation and disease while other millions fled from  
Ireland by whatever means possible.

While the Irish were suffering from starvation, the English



were importing for their own use, and for profit, grains grown in Ireland, and passing ever more stringent laws taxing and restricting the Catholic poor. Laws were passed committing them to hard labor for vagrancy if they wandered about, seeking food.

The peasantry had no way to protect themselves from economic exploitation, and they tended increasingly to take the law into their own hands. Over all of Ireland, the urgent desperation of hunger had caused a shifting of social problems from civil disobedience to stealing for survival. Theft of cattle and pigs, and stealing foods from vessels in the harbors became common. Rioting was a serious problem throughout the 1840s and as time went by, it became widespread in protest of the stringent laws and restrictions that kept the poor from helping themselves.

County Tipperary was most active in resistance and the "lawless" were being arrested and imprisoned. Arrest for refusing to help peace officers and attempting to free those in the hands of the police grew in numbers in 1847 through 1849. In Tipperary, arrests of rioters, and for unlawful assembly had reached amazing proportions by 1849. Amid these pressures and threats, young men in droves were leaving the country and going to London, to whatever jobs could be found. Many had the intention of "earning the cost of the road to America."

#### MICHAEL REAGAN LEAVES IRELAND

The timing of Michael Reagan's leaving Ireland coincided with this accumulation of threats and stresses in his home country. He had as well a personal reason for leaving his home area. Doolis offered little hope for a young man's future or for furnishing the needs of a young family. The crude stone huts offered no warmth or inspiration, and there was no work that provided security.

Michael took with him to London a local girl, Catherine Mulcahy. Irish sources say that the name Mulcahy originated



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in south Tipperary, and was derived from St. Cathach. Catherine was born about 1822-1823, and was the daughter of Patrick Mulcahy, a laborer. She and Michael were married 30 October 1852 at St. George's Roman Catholic Church, Southwark, London. Michael was working as a soap maker. Their first child Thomas was named after his father's father, and was born 15 May 1852 at Peckham, and baptised 16 May 1852 at St. George's.

The marriage certificate was witnessed by Michael's brother Nicholas, who signed the document with his mark. The registrar gave Nicholas's surname "Regan" while Michael signed himself "Reagan," a form of spelling not used in Ireland. Literacy was marginal in these times, and Nicholas, and also Catherine, were listed in later records as illiterate while another brother John and Michael could read and write. In Ireland, Michael and John apparently had the benefit of "hedge row schools," where the teacher worked in the fields with the families and taught the children surreptitiously.

Two other children were born in London to Michael and Catherine. John Michael was born 29 May 1854 at Peckham and was baptised 4 June 1854 at St. George's, Southwark. He was to be the father of John Edward Reagan, and grandfather of President Ronald Reagan. Margaret, named after Michael's mother, was born in 1856. Following these, the fourth child, William, was born about 1859 in Illinois in the midlands of the United States where the family had gone by way of Canada.

#### MIGRATION TO AMERICA

Migration in these times was a hazardous undertaking for the poor. Liverpool was the leading British port, but many Irish left from Cork and Galway. In addition to these points of departure, countless small craft of every variety and condition left from almost every small port on the west coast of Ireland on the way to Canada and to the United States. Canadian ships which had brought lumber or other cargo



across the Atlantic would make extra profit by sailing back with passengers packed aboard.

In 1819, the United States, at last alarmed by the loss of life of immigrants on shipboard, due to overcrowding and lack of concern for passengers' well being, had passed stringent laws regarding immigration ships, regulating the number of passengers that could be crowded aboard. Ship's officers were required to account for every passenger, whether dying at sea, or at last landing on shore. The passenger lists presented to customs authorities contained the name, age, sex and occupation of each individual. The first official statistics of immigration began with this law. Even with these restrictions, the poor in steerage still found the journey fraught with discomfort and hazards, for they occupied dark and confining quarters, rat infested, filthy and with stagnant air.

Ships bound for Canada had no such regulations, and countless lives were lost for lack of food and care for the Irish sad and weakened condition. The ships carrying these emigrants were nicknamed "coffin ships" because of the great loss of life at sea. The starving people who survived the passage were quarantined in great numbers on landing, where many died and were buried namelessly in mass graves on Canadian soil. On Partridge Island in the mouth of the St. Lawrence River, the dead were buried in trenches. Grosse Island in the St. Lawrence was the burial place of thousands. More than 20,000 unmarked graves lie along the borders of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. Families would be wiped out without a trace.

Loss of life could come about during the voyage, or shortly after arrival, in hospitals where the travelers had been taken for care. When they finally reached their destination, famine-wrought disease frequently wiped out the pilgrimage.

The young family of Michael Reagan would have been more fortunate than many of his suffering countrymen. With his job in England, his children would have been fed, and no doubt, from meager wages, money would have been put



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away for supplies for the voyage. The Reagan emigration seems to have been no random journey to "the land of the young which lies in the west."

Many Irish immigrants settled on the east coast of America, taking low paying jobs involving hard labor. Others worked their way inland, finding jobs on new railroad lines and canals, on frontiers where they would at last make their homes. Surviving in difficult times had given them strength and endurance and made possible their survival in new areas where their vigor, ingenuity and resourcefulness contributed to developing the new nation beyond measure.

The Reagans were not sailing to whatever port they could reach in desperation, for apparently they did not linger on the east coast. Instead they seemed to have gone purposefully to a prearranged location, going to Illinois near the center of the United States.

#### THE REAGAN NAME IN ILLINOIS

The family was not the first of that name to reach Illinois. The 1850 census of the state listed eight households with the surname spelled Reagan. They were:

Ellen Reagan	Hancock County
Henry Reagan	Clark County
James Reagan	Madison County
John Reagan	Clark County
John Regan	La Salle County
Joshua Reagan	Macon County
Marie Reagan	LaSalle County
Celia Reagan	St. Clair County

Reference is made to other spelling of the name: Ragan, Ragen, Raggen, Ragin, Regan, Rigan. All could be variations of the same surname, ascribed by the whims or abilities of various census takers.

"Regan" was found in the counties of Morgan, DeKalb, Stark, Winnebago, Madison, Kane, Cook, Jo Davies, and Clark counties.

"Regen" was found in Adams and Hancock counties in 1850 and a "Michl" Regan appeared in Cook County in that year. How many, if any of these, had ties with Michael's family is not known.

#### FAIR HAVEN, CARROLL COUNTY, ILLINOIS

In 1860, in the census of Fair Haven Township, Carroll County, is found positive identification of Michael's family with this information: Michael "Reigan," age 25, born in Ireland, was a farmer with real estate valued at \$1120 and personal property valued at \$150. His wife Catherine, also born in Ireland was 30 years old. Their children appeared:

Thomas	age 7	born in England
John	age 5	born in England
Margaret	age 3	born in England
William	age 1	born in Illinois

In Michael's household were also two of his brothers. Nicholas was 35, listed as a farm laborer, born in Ireland. John P. was 30, also born in Ireland.

In the 1880 census, Nicholas appeared with his own household, and he is now 60, and a farmer. His wife Maria was 42. Their children appeared:

Maggie	age 18	born 1862 in Ohio
Thomas	age 17	born 1863 in Ohio
John	age 15	born 1865 in Illinois
Ellen	age 12	born 1868 in Illinois
(Michael?) Maeshal	age 6	born 1874 in Illinois

The record of the children born in Ohio is not explained. Perhaps he married a widow. His wife Maria was from Ireland.

#### LAND OWNERSHIP IN ILLINOIS

Michael's arrival in Illinois was between 1856 and 1859, and it is interesting to speculate how, in the 1860 census he



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#### ROLL COUNTY, ILLINOIS

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#### SHIP IN ILLINOIS

ois was between 1856 and 1859,  
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could appear as the owner of real estate valued at \$1120. This  
was a substantial amount for a man who could not have  
brought more than subsistence with him when he came. A  
survey of the land ownership laws may provide an explana-  
tion.

The United States Government had offered land for sale to  
settlers by 1796, but they offered more than a settler could  
farm or pay for. Their offer was for 640 acres as a unit which  
sold for not less than \$2.00 an acre. After revisions and re-  
ductions, by 1820, land could be purchased in 80 acre tracts,  
with the cost down to \$1.25 an acre.

In 1832 the minimum was reduced to 40 acres with price  
still at \$1.25 an acre. This was followed by an important in-  
novation that actually made it possible for anyone willing to  
work to become the owner of 40 acres without any money in-  
volved. Between 1801 and 1841, sixteen "preemption" laws  
were passed. These laws allowed the actual settler to possess  
the land without cost, as opposed to purchase by speculators.

The land laws were of great aid to the settler on the far-  
thest edge of the frontier. He had acreage he could manage  
most economically and his own labor paid for his land.

The preemption system and the Homestead Act, provid-  
ing "free" homes to settlers served the purpose of the govern-  
ment, increasing national prosperity with a new basis for tax-  
ation in the increased value of the land.

There were thousands of acres still in wilderness, from  
which the settler could choose his acreage without cost. Four  
years after he began cultivation, he owned his house and his  
land, and during that time the profits of his labor were his.

#### MICHAEL REAGAN AS FARMER

Which of the family was first in the area is not known, nor  
the order of their arrival, but in a Carroll County directory  
of 1878, five Reagan families lived within three adjoining  
sections of land in the southern part of Fairhaven township  
in southern Carroll County, Illinois. A map of the county

shows these sections just south of and adjoining the post office of Fair Haven and a nearby school. These families would have become land owners through the benefits of the pre-emption law, their time and labor providing the attainment of their goal.

The five adjoining families, all now spelled Reagan, were:

Section 21	Reagan, Michael
	Reagan, John
	Reagan, Thomas
Section 22	Reagan, John
Section 23	Reagan, N.

Thomas, oldest son of Michael, would now be about 25 years old and his brother John would be about 23. Neither of them appeared in Michael's household in the 1880 census. It is reasonable to assume that both Thomas and John in Section 21 would be the sons of Michael located there, now with households of their own. John appearing in Section 22, and N. Reagan in Section 23, would be the adults in Michael's household in the 1860 census, without doubt his brothers.

Michael's daughter Margaret married Orson Baldwin, a store keeper of Bennett, Iowa. She was to play an important role in the family, bringing up her orphaned nephew, John Edward Reagan, father of President Ronald Reagan.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF ILLINOIS

The upper area of Illinois lies between Lake Michigan in the east and the Mississippi river which forms the western boundary of the state. The state of Illinois contains 56,400 square miles. The area of Ireland is 26,600 square miles with a central plateau surrounded by isolated groups of hills and mountains.

Compared to Ireland as a beleaguered island, Illinois with its rich farmland, was part of then 3,022,387 acres of the United States, through which any citizen could freely travel. The awesome size and grandeur of this great expanse with



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mountains, rivers, and vast plains might make Ireland's be-  
loved hills and streams seem diminished. But certainly the  
air of freedom would be most impressive and welcome. A  
man could choose his place of dwelling and occupation, edu-  
cate his children in public schools open to all, attend the  
established church of his choice, or even start a new one if  
he felt so inspired. In America, the citizen was free to say or  
publish what he thought of the government, or any American  
institution. His right to vote gave self government to the citi-  
zens of each small county, each state, and to the total union  
of states.

Migration to Illinois bordering the Mississippi River took  
place in three general waves in the settlement of the frontier.  
First, explorers, trappers and hunters came through with no  
intention of improving the country.

The second wave was made up of "squatters," occupying  
without trying to own, a tract of land, living in rude cabins  
and growing food in a small area, depending mostly upon  
hunting and the natural vegetation to provide food.

The third group meant to stay, and they acquired title to  
the land and developed homes that would be passed on to  
their children. The dreams of the pioneers were equaled by  
nature's beauty and generous offering. The promise was un-  
limited, but the first struggles of the newcomer were gruel-  
ing and progress was slow and hard-earned. On arrival, their  
welcome could be fearsome, no habitation waiting for them,  
no house or shelter and scant means of providing food. If  
they came singly, they were strangers in a wilderness, and  
their neighbors might be miles away. But the newcomers, in-  
cluding the Irish, had strength, ingenuity and resourcefulness  
and lost no time adapting their lives to their new environ-  
ment. These strengths provided their survival.

#### MAKING A HOME IN AMERICA

The first task of the new arrival would be to build a shelter  
for his family. In Ireland, the farm cottages were made of

stones, stacked by hand with the chinks filled with grass or mud. They were cold and offered little comfort. Since the landlord could, almost at will, dispossess his tenant and take possession of his property, there was little incentive to make the farm house durable or comfortable.

Here in the settler's new location, plentiful timber made possible a dry and comfortable house made of stacked layers of squared logs, notched so corners dovetailed, with clay closing the chinks and corners to make it secure from cold, marauding small animals and insects. The lack of windows could have an advantage; the warm air did not escape. The blazing fireplace in winter and in the evenings lighted the house.

The settler could freely chose the materials about him for home building and the wood made the making of furniture possible as well, in contrast to Irish cottages where stones for seats and rushes stacked for beds might be the only furniture. Here boxes that brought provisions could be used for chairs. Or sections of tree trunks could be rolled into the house and set on end for chairs or used to make a rustic table, with a few boards nailed on top to provide space for nourishing meals. A bench could be made from a log, hewn square. Beds were rough frames covered with mattresses filled with corn husks or straw. Strong sticks could make legs for a table made of a split log, and a smaller version made sturdy stools.

There were two essential tools for life on the frontier; a long handled axe and a rifle. The settler used his axe not only to make his home and his furniture, but to shape farm implements and wooden kitchen ware. All his needs were self-provided, except for iron and salt. His gun was not only used for hunting game, but also as protection from hostile strangers, so that the homeowner could secure his property.

At first arrival, cooking might be done out of doors on open fires, or stone ovens could be built. When cabins were completed, there would likely be a fireplace on the floor at the end of the building, its crude chimney made from stones gathered from the land and walled together with clay. The



the chinks filled with grass or offered little comfort. Since the landowner dispossessed his tenant and take no payment, there was little incentive to make the house comfortable.

Location, plentiful timber made the house made of stacked layers of logs, corners dovetailed, with clay close-fitted to make it secure from cold, made it comfortable. The lack of windows could be made up by the blazing fire. The evenings lighted the house. The materials about him for the making of furniture were abundant. Irish cottages where stones for fireplaces might be the only furniture. Divisions could be used for chairs. Logs could be rolled into the house and used to make a rustic table, with a large space for nourishing food from a log, hewn square. Beds with mattresses filled with corn cobs could make legs for a table made of logs. The version made sturdy stools.

Tools for life on the frontier; a settler used his axe not only for furniture, but to shape farm implements. All his needs were self-sufficient. His gun was not only used for protection from hostile strangers, but could secure his property.

Light might be done out of doors on a fire. When cabins were built, a fireplace on the floor at one end, a chimney made from stones and walled together with clay. The

fireplace was deep to keep the fire from threatening the house, and a large section of the floor near the fire would be paved with small stones.

Once his family was sheltered, the settler turned his attention to the land. In the Fair Haven area where the Reagans settled, there were scattered groves and trees, mostly scrubby black oak. To clear his land, the settler felled the trees and with the help of neighbors, rolled them into a pile for burning. Or, if he had to work alone, he could kill the trees by girdling the bark about three feet from the ground and let the trees decay. He could plow around them and seed the ground to corn. Beans, melons, pumpkin and squash were planted in the corn rows, with the family watching carefully their subsistence as it grew. In the rich black soil with rain usually plentiful, grass for livestock and crops was assured.

But there was competition for the crops. The children were called upon to scare away "millions" of birds of every kind who waited to scratch up the seed in the spring planting. Blackbirds, crows, pigeons, wild turkey, snipe, quail, prairie chickens and ducks were part of literally clouds of birds that could fill the air. The birds would be waiting again to help harvest the ripe grain, and once more the family would have to be vigilant. Men and boys would hunt the raccoons who came foraging in the fields at night.

In Ireland, the peasants were forbidden to take for themselves any wild game or birds, all of which were the property of the landlord. The Irish newcomer must have been truly amazed at the kind and quantity of wild life that thrived in the woods and fields with a plentiful water supply. Deer, bear, panther, fox, wolf and wild cat were abundant. Buffalo, roaming the prairie lands, could come into the area. Beaver, otter, and mink still survived along the streams although the early hunters had reduced their numbers. Two men in five weeks killed 1600 muskrats, the pelts of which brought \$200 to each man.

Fish were abundant in the streams, and could be had by

anyone diligent enough to catch them. Another creature made its presence known. Rattlesnakes hibernated in dens in winter and came out when the early spring sun warmed the ground. A group of fishermen became conscious of a stirring on the ground about them, and discovered they were not alone. They laid down their fishing poles and took up sticks, and killed one hundred and ninety rattlers, no doubt forgetting to return to fishing again on that particular expedition. One of the early settlers built his "house" eight or ten feet up a tree to escape the company of snakes. The pioneers knew of a herb called "Rattlesnake Master," for the cure of snake bite.

The atmosphere in mid America would be a great change from the mists and the damp winds blowing across Ireland from the sea on the west, moderating the winter and providing cool summers. In Illinois, the air was clear, dry and invigorating. Storms could be impressive with sharp lightning and great rumblings of thunder with torrents of rain, all of which could come up quickly. The transition from one season to another was often abrupt, and autumn colors would produce a show of woods aflame with early frosts that were keenly cold.

Winter varied in severity. The first settlers arrived with teams of oxen, and the first year the oxen were turned loose to forage in the rushes near the river and survived the winter well. A few years later, winter showed another disposition and the Mississippi froze so solidly that a farmer drove across it with a team of oxen pulling a load of lumber. Winter nights could be bitterly cold but beautiful with a clear sky and brilliant stars.

Peat was available in Ireland, but the poor tenant might not be allowed a plentiful supply. Here energy and diligence were the only requirements to provide stacks of wood for the taking, to warm the cabin and cook the food.

Springtime might seem long in coming: the pioneer had a saying, "When the days begin to lengthen, then the cold be-



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and, but the poor tenant might not apply. Here energy and diligence were to provide stacks of wood for the fire and cook the food.

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gins to strengthen." But both spring and autumn would have a number of fine days in spite of being the rainiest seasons.

Here as the seasons passed the pioneer lived in a pleasant land with abundant food, a secure home, schools for his children and opportunity for his descendants to become great beyond the wildest dreams of his humble beginnings. Thus a new kind of man was generated by the American experience, as shown in the progress from Michael Reagan, poor but diligent in a new land, to his great grandson, able and confident serving as president of that land—Ronald Wilson Reagan.





The White House, Washington, D.C.



The Presidential Seal.

## The Link with Ballyporeen

The Irish ancestry of Ronald Reagan, President of the United States of America, and of his brother Neil was established by researchers from Debrett's Peerage Ltd., England. Using standard methods of research, they traced the Reagan roots back to his great-great-grandfather, one Thomas Regan, of Doolis, Ballyporeen, Co. Tipperary.

Most people have little trouble in tracing their ancestry to their grandparents. Either they know them personally in which case there is no problem, or if they are dead older relatives will remember them. Ronald Reagan's grandfather was called John Reagan; he died in Fulton, Illinois, in 1889. Using available written records, among them the American census of 1860, it was possible to trace John Reagan's parents' marriage to England in 1852 and to find the record of his own birth in London on 4th June 1854.

John Reagan was the son of Michael Reagan, who had married Catherine Mulcahy on 31st October 1852 in Southwark, South London. The English census of 30th March 1851 listed Michael Reagan as being aged 21 and a native of Co. Tipperary, Ireland.

Further research in Ireland revealed that he had been born in Doolis, Ballyporeen, Co. Tipperary, and was baptised in the Roman Catholic church at Ballyporeen on 3rd September 1829. He was the youngest son of Thomas Regan and Margaret Murphy, of Doolis. The records went back no further.

The link with Ballyporeen was officially recognised on St. Patrick's Day (17 March) 1981 when

## The Parish Records of Ballyporeen

A parish is a district within a diocese, under the care of a pastor. The parish of Ballyporeen is part of the Diocese of Waterford and Lismore, and forms the north-western boundary of the ancient Irish kingdom of the Déise (pronounced *day-sha*).

Roman Catholic parishes always keep records of Baptisms and Marriages; sometimes records of other church events are also kept. Few parish records in Ireland go back before 1800. For much of the 18th century, the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland was oppressed by Penal Laws, and persecuted Churches tend not to keep records. The laws were eventually relaxed and were finally repealed in 1829.

The Registers of Ballyporeen Parish for Baptisms and Marriages begin in 1817. At that time the parish was known as Templetenny, the name changing to Ballyporeen towards the end of the last century. Accordingly, the Baptismal Register for 1829 is in fact the Templetenny Baptismal Register, the first volume covering 1817-1872.

## Explanation of Text

Roman Catholic parishes have traditionally kept their official records in Latin. Thus, in old registers words like 'Baptism', 'son of', and first names appear in Latin; surnames and place-names are in English. In an apparent effort to use paper sparingly, Latin abbreviations were commonly used, e.g. 'Ss' for the Latin word 'Suscipientibus' meaning those who take on the duty of godparents. The entries were always made by priests, writing with quill pens; the ink was a mixture of black powder and water. Different mixes of ink had different lasting properties, so on a particular page in an old register the entries for a few days may be crystal clear, followed by badly faded ones.

We are concerned with lines 3 and 4 at the top of the left-hand page. (The first '3' with the symbol over it, is at present unexplained). It reads as follows, in Latin, with the abbreviated words enclosed in I

3 B(aptizavi) Michael fi(li)um Thomae Rega  
et Margaritae Murphy de Doolis  
S(uscipientibu)s Gulielmus Regan et Catha

In English, that would read:

On the 3rd I Baptised: Michael, son of The  
and Margaret Murphy of Doolis;  
Godparents: William Regan and Cathari

The "M+R" was the signature of the Priest who performed the ceremony of Baptism. On some entries he signed his full name, Martin Redmond; if there was less room he signed as M. Redmond; if there was little or no room, he used M+R. (See the end of the ei for his full signature "Martinus Re

33/B. Michael fi. lium Thomae Regan et Margaritae Murphy de Doolis  
Suscipientibus Gulielmus Regan et Catharina





Official Seal of Ballyporeen Parish.



Church of the Assumption, Ballyporeen.



## Reagan — Regan — O'Regan

In 1829 the people of the Parish of Templetenny were basically speakers of the Irish language, sometimes known as Gaelic. In that language, most surnames have an "O" prefix. Some names retain the "O" in English, some do not — Irish people themselves are not very consistent on this matter to the present day. For example, five of the six children of Thomas Regan and Margaret Murphy of Doolis, are listed in the Templetenny Baptismal Register. In three of the entries the father is called "Regan", in the other two "O'Regan".

There was a tendency at the time to spell phonetically — to spell a word the same way as it sounds. (Americans tend to spell phonetically, so "colour" in English usage, becomes "color" in American).

The Gaelic form of Regan is "Ó Riagáin" (pronounced O'Ree-gawn); it was sometimes spelled as "Ó Réagáin" (O'Ray-gawn). It is therefore a natural development to find Irish-speaking Michael Regan spelling his surname as "Reagan" in the marriage register at Southwark, London; subsequently he and his descendants retained the Reagan spelling.

To show that the spellings were interchangeable in the usage of the time, the same people are sometimes named in the Templetenny Baptismal Register as "Regan" and at other times "Reagan", and these entries were made by highly educated priests.

## The Townland of Doolis

Doolis is a townland of 229 acres, situated about three miles west of the village of Ballyporeen. A "townland" in Ireland is a small territorial unit, useful for identifying the location of a place in agricultural land. The name Doolis is a corruption of the Gaelic "Dubhlios" (pronounced Dhuv-liss), meaning "dark fairy-fort". The townland of Doolis is now uninhabited farmland.

In the 1830s, before the great Famine of the next decade, Doolis had many families; in 1841 it had a population of 129 people. The houses of poor labourers like Thomas Regan would have been constructed of mud and wattles. When they were later abandoned, the rain would simply have washed them back into the soil. No trace would remain.

## Templetenny Graveyard

The graveyard surrounding the ruined church of Templetenny is presumed to be the burial ground of the Regan family of Doolis. It would be quite extraordinary if it were not since Doolis is less than half-a-mile away from the cemetery. None of the existing tombstones seems to have been erected by the Regan family, which may be for either of two reasons. A poor family, which they were, may not have had a tombstone at all; or else, since the family left the area for America, an untended tombstone may gradually have sunk beneath the surface, as many others have done.

An annual Mass is celebrated in the graveyard for the repose of the souls of all those buried there.

## The Ruined Church of Templetenny

Templetenny, "the Church of the Marsh", contains the ruins of an old church building and a graveyard. The precise age of the church is unknown, but it clearly goes back several centuries since it had fallen into disuse by the mid-1700s.

The modern-day Church of the Assumption in Ballyporeen village was built in 1828. Michael Regan would have been among the first to be baptised there a year later, and the family of Thomas Regan would have walked to Mass there from Doolis every Sunday. The church today serves a parish population of about 1,400; in the 1840s the parishioners numbered over 5,000.

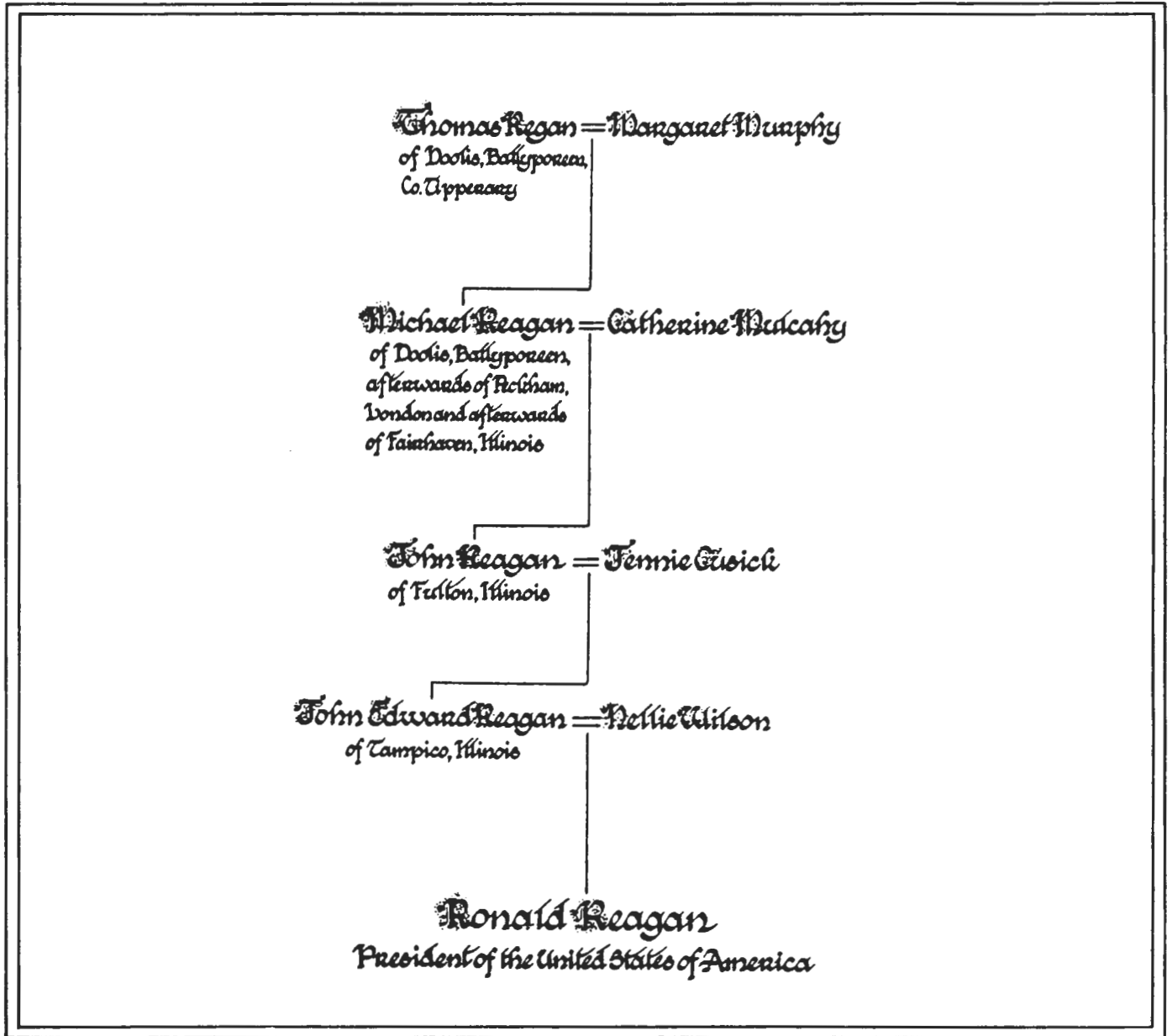
Before 1828, the people worshipped in a small thatch-roofed church in Carrigvisteal, about half-a-mile north of Ballyporeen. Before that again, there was an era when they would not have been allowed to have any church, during which time Templetenny Church fell into ruins.

In earlier times, the church in Templetenny was the centre of worship for the district, probably for centuries, and the dead of the area were buried there. It is sacred ground.

M+R

+R

Sinsearaí Éireannaí  
an Uachtaráin  
Ragnall Ó Riagáin



The Irish Ancestry  
of President Ronald Reagan

The pedigree above, derived from research carried out by DeBrette Irish Ancestry Service, has been recorded in Volume 29, folio 167 of the series of Registered Pedigrees preserved in this Office:

Genealogical Office,

Overleaf: A facsimile of facing pages in the Baptismal Register of Templetenny — later Ballyporeen — Parish for 1829. The Baptism of Michael Reagan, President Reagan's great-grandfather is recorded in



## The Family of Thomas Regan of Doolis

Thomas Regan, a labourer, was married to Margaret Murphy sometime prior to 1817. They had six children, three boys and three girls: Nicholas, born before 1817; Ellen (b. 1819), John (b. 1821), Margaret (b. 1823), Elizabeth (b. 1826) and Michael (b. 1829).

Nicholas, the eldest, accompanied his youngest brother Michael to London, where he was a witness at Michael's marriage to Catherine Mulcahy in 1852. The marriage certificate mentioned that the father, Thomas, was by now deceased. Both Nicholas and John later worked for their brother Michael in Fairhaven, Illinois, and apparently never married.

The subsequent history of the three girls, who presumably remained in Ireland and married, is unknown at present.

# Birth and Baptismal Certificate

Diocese of.....<sup>Waterford &  
Lismore.</sup>..... Parish of.....<sup>Ballyporeen.</sup>.....

On examination of the Register of Baptisms of above Parish I certify  
that according to it.....<sup>Michael Regan</sup>.....

was born on.....day of....., and was  
baptised according to the Rites of the Catholic Church on...<sup>3rd</sup>...day  
of...<sup>September, 1829</sup>....In the Church of...the Assumption,...  
.....<sup>Ballyporeen,</sup>.....by the Rev...<sup>Martin Redmond, C.C.</sup>.....

Parents.....<sup>Thomas Regan (Doolis),</sup>.....  
.....<sup>Margaret Murphy</sup>.....

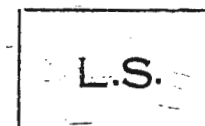
Sponsors.....<sup>William Regan</sup>.....  
.....<sup>Catharine Walsh</sup>.....

Confirmed.....<sup>No record</sup>..... Married.....<sup>No record</sup>.....

Signed.....<sup>M. Fanna Condon C.C. P.P.</sup>.....

Given this...<sup>3rd</sup>...day of...<sup>September</sup>...19<sup>81</sup>...at.....

.....<sup>Ballyporeen Co. Tipperary, Ireland.</sup>.....





THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

*Bill Stetzel*

TO: Mike ~~Deaver~~/Bill Sittmann

FROM: KATHY OSBORNE  
Personal Secretary  
to the President

DATE: 3-12-84

FYI

ON MARCH 17, the more than 42 million Americans who can claim roots in Ireland's past, along with those who wish they could, will gather to celebrate the Wearing of the Green and their ties to the Olde Sod. Among the many fascinated by the details of their own family history is the president's son.

By RON REAGAN

WHEN I WAS eight or nine, my father told me that the name Reagan was Irish and this, among other things, was what we were.

Very slowly, and only as I grew older, did I become interested in my family's history.

My curiosity quickened when Debrett's, the genealogical tracing organization in England, provided my father with the paternal side of his family tree. Here at last were names attached to real people, confirmed dates of lifetimes and, frustrating at the time, actual places to visit. Naturally when the opportunity finally arose to travel to Ireland, I was more than eager.

The story I unearthed is brief but intriguing. Early in the 1800's in a small township called Doolis, three miles west of the slightly larger Ballyporeen in County Tipperary, a young man named Thomas Regan married a woman named Margaret Murphy.

Between 1816 and 1829 they had six children. The youngest, a son, they named Michael. In the late 40's or early 50's, at the height of the potato famine, Michael left for England, where his name was changed to Reagan, and married a Tipperary girl, Catherine Mulcahy.

Gathering up their family, including second son John, they moved to America in 1858, reaching Illinois via the St. Lawrence River and Canada. John, married to Jennie Cusack, died young in a farming accident but not before fathering one daughter and two sons. John and Jennie's youngest son was John Edward. He remained in Illinois, became a shoe salesman and married Nellie Wilson. Their youngest son, my father born in 1911, was named Ronald.

On my journey to explore the beginnings of this genealogical record, my wife Doria and I flew over Ireland's western coast.

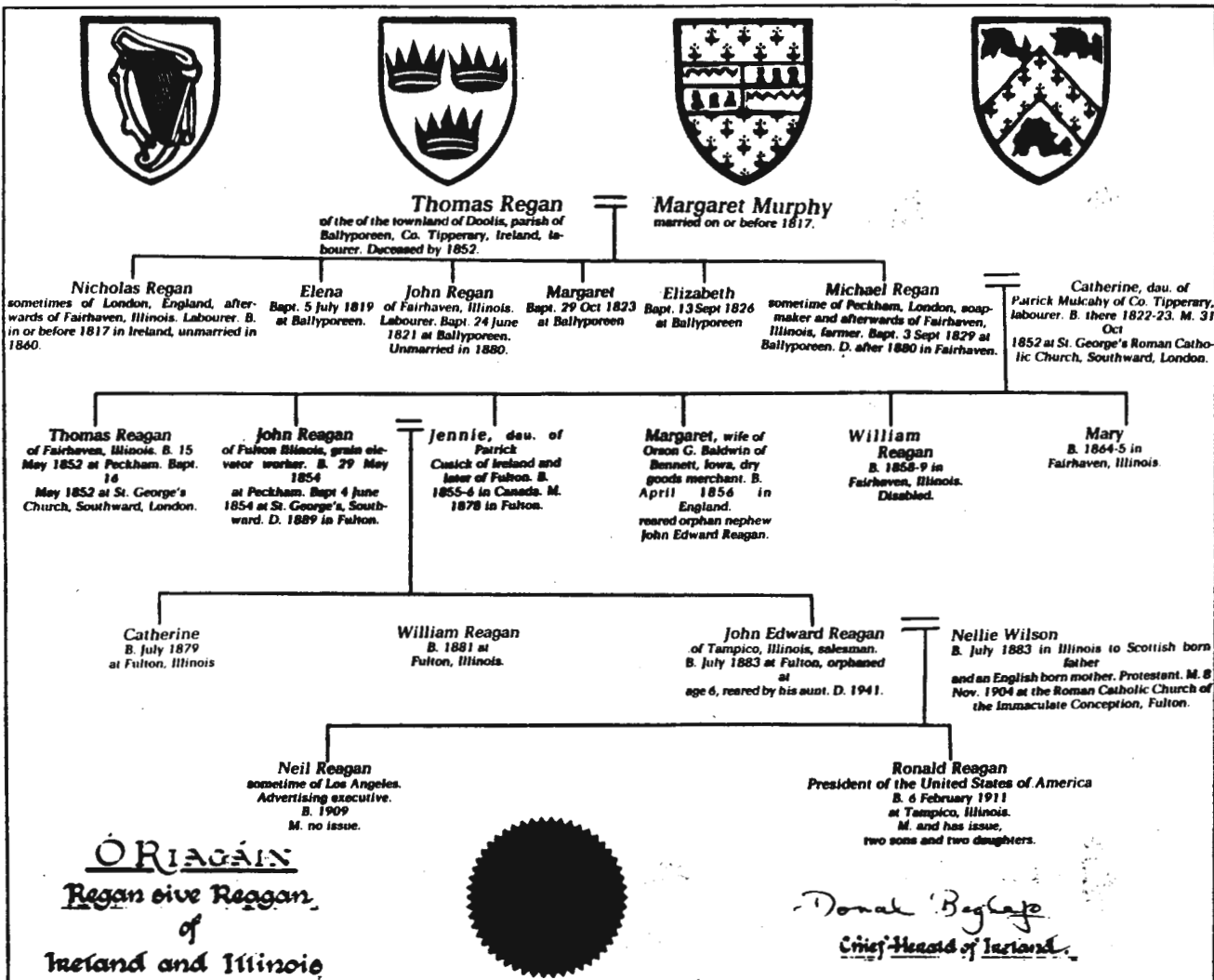
Our first stop was with Tom Lindert, who researched the Irish bough of my family tree for Debrett's.

Well-kept records (birth and death certificates, marriage licenses, etc.) in Illinois leave a clear paper trail leading from my father to his father, his grandfather and eventually to Michael Regan.

U.S. census data and an Illinois death certificate indicate my great-great-grandfather Michael was born in Ireland, had three children in England,

Chasing your own Irish roots? See Travel, page 36.

# Ron Reagan traces presidential family tree



came to America in 1858 and had two more children.

From there, the research jumps the Atlantic. Michael's age and county of birth, Tipperary, turn up in an English census, and English General Registration records tell us he married Catherine Mulcahy, seven years his senior, on October 31, 1852, in St. George's Catholic Church, London. The wedding ceremony took place five and a half months after the delivery of their first son.

At this point, names become important. It is Irish tradition to name the first son and daughter after their paternal grandparents. Michael and Catherine named theirs Thomas and Margaret. Therefore, when the trail crossed the channel into Ireland and dropped into Tom Lindert's lap, he knew what to look for: Michael Regan, born 1829 or 1830 in County Tipperary of

parents Thomas and Margaret.

The Tithe Applotment, compiled between 1824 and 1830, and Griffith's Valuation of the 1830's and 1840's, both housed in Dublin's National Library, are the most complete records of tax-paying Irish householders from that era. The former reveals nine Catholic parishes in Tipperary containing Regans but only one, in Ballyporeen, lists a Michael born at the right time.

Baptismal records in the trust of the parish curate, Father Eanna Condon, show him christened on September 3, 1829, by parents — you guessed it — Thomas and Margaret. His brothers and sisters are listed as well, excepting eldest brother Nicholas, who was baptized before the records were started in 1817.

Can my family be traced further back? Lindert is skeptical. In the

18th and 19th centuries, and certainly before, Ireland's populace was not regularly surveyed. Records undertaken, often concerning taxes paid to English landlords, did not always survive.

Months of painstaking research may have turned up further clues — unfortunately, this time we must satisfy ourselves with a trip to the homeland, Ballyporeen, and a look at the Father Condon's baptismal record.

The book is remarkably well preserved. What were once loose leaves were bound in leather around 1890 by a resident priest. The pages are yellow, the ink faded, but Father Martin Redmond's Latin script still reaches us from 1829 — "Michael filium Thomas Regan et Margaret Murphy de Doolis."

Holding this book, I am as close as I will come to touching the lives of my Irish ancestors.



The young Ronald Reagan, in white suit, with parents and brother Neil in a 1913 family photo taken in Tampico, Ill. Reagan passed along his respect of his Irish heritage to his own children.

With Father Condon as guide, we took the countryside around Ballyporeen. We slow down near a field indistinguishable from its neighbors except by a large tree in the near corner.

Here, Father Condon explains, a thatched-roof

church once stood. It burned down in the 1820's but in its time, Thomas Regan's time, it served the surrounding communities. Almost certainly this was where Thomas married Margaret. Judging by its size, the magnificently

spreading tree was a sapling on that wedding day over 167 years ago. Today, not a cornerstone of the old chapel remains.

Of all the places we've visited, this, for me, holds the greatest fascination.

(c) 1984, Ron Reagan. Distributed by the Los Angeles Times Syndicate

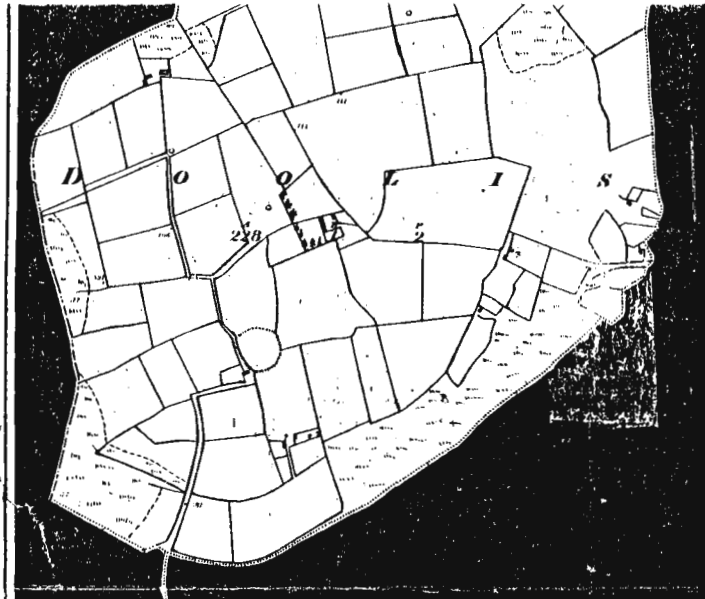


# Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Digital Collections

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This is not a presidential record. This marker is used as an administrative marker by the Ronald W. Reagan Presidential Library Staff. This marker identifies that there was an object in this folder that could not be scanned due to its size.

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Doolis: the pre-famine ordnance survey map showing 12 houses in the townland. But, according to the parish records, there were 38 families there at that time

# How the root-finders reached Ballyporeen

By LIAM MOHER

BALLYPOREEN did not claim Ronald Reagan — he was thrust upon it.

The story of the three strangers who walked into O'Farrell's bar on the morning of Saturday, November 8, has now been reported across the English-speaking world.

One of them was Hugh Peskett, the chief genealogist of Debrett Ancestry Research in London.

The presidential root-finders had reached the end of the line, but for Ballyporeen it was the start of something akin to a rebirth. "Suddenly," says John O'Farrell, "we were on the world map."

Being from Ballyporeen no longer involves a somewhat defensive explanation of where you came from, or of how to get there.

But how did the genealogists get there? The route is given by Debrett in a memorandum entitled "The Search for Ronald Reagan's Roots":

## (A) In America

1 Research began with modern records in Illinois courthouses and National Archives, Washington. According to The Current Biography Yearbook, 1967, Ronald Reagan was born on February 6, 1911, at Tampico, Whiteside Co., Illinois (120 miles west of Chicago). Elder brother J. Neil Reagan, son of John Edward and Nellie (Wilson) Reagan, the father a

first generation Irish Catholic, the mother an English / Scottish background Protestant.

2 Research shows that they married on November 8, 1904, at the Catholic church of the Immaculate Conception, Fulton, Ill. The father was a well-known alcoholic and the mother, brought up the children as strict Protestants, despite the Catholic marriage (see Ronald Reagan's 1965 autobiography).

## 3 U.S. Census 1900 records:

(a) John Regan (sic), Ronald's father, born July, 1883 in Illinois, father born in England, dry goods sales-



DEBRETT'S PEERAGE LIMITED

## Debrett Ancestry Research

man, live with his aunt Margaret (Reagan) Baldwin, wife of dry goods merchant Orson G. Baldwin in Bennett, Iowa, she being listed as born April 1856 in England. Both parents born in Ireland, immigrated 1858.

(b) Nellie Wilson in Fulton, Ill, born July 1883, the youngest of seven children of English-born Mary Wilson, widow of a man born in Scotland.

4 To cut a long story short, the U.S. trail leads back, using entirely conventional vital records, census, to the earliest record of the family in America. This is

the U.S. Census 1860 listing the household in Carroll County (north-west Illinois). Michael Reagan was a farmer, owning real estate worth the then significant figure of \$1,120. His wife was Catherine (maiden name Mulcahy, learnt from later death certificates) and they had children: Thomas (age 7), John (age 5), Margaret (age 3), all three born in England, and William (age 1) and born in Illinois (there was also a later daughter, Mary, born in 1865, not listed here). Michael and his wife were listed (ages very approximate only) as aged 25 and 30, and both born in Ireland. As well, they had living with them, Nicholas Regan (age 35) and John P. Reagan (age 30) who were both labourers born in Ireland (it later emerged that this was literate Michael, the farmer, employing his illiterate elder brothers as labourers).

5 We knew the family had immigrated in 1858, and the most probable route was via Montreal and the Great Lakes, as then, Canada being like Ireland in the British empire, immigration was easier by that route.

## (B) In England

8 English research came next as we knew that the Reagans had had three children born there. The marriage record was found of Michael Reagan (son of Thomas, a deceased labourer) and Catherine Mulcahy (daughter of Patrick, a labourer), married on October 31, 1852 at St. George's

Catholic Cathedral in Southwark, South London. Both gave their address as Bexley Street in Peckham (where there was an Irish community). Witnesses included Nicholas Regan (sic). Michael could sign his name, and he signed "Reagan"; neither Catherine nor Nicholas could write and the priest entered Nicholas's name as "Regan" (the more usual spelling). The baptism registers of that church recorded their son Thomas born before their



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## Debrett Ancestry Research

marriage on May 15 and baptised on May 16, 1852, and their son John (Ronald Reagan's grandfather), born on May 29 and baptised on June 4, 1854.

7 The English census of March 30, 1851, listed both Michael Reagan and Catherine Mulcahy as aged 21 and 28 respectively, and both born in Co. Tipperary, Ireland.

## (C) In Ireland

8 We were able to begin research in Ireland with the following briefing:

(a) We were seeking Michael Reagan, born in Co. Tipperary ca. 1829/30.  
(b) Knowing he named his eldest son

Thomas and his eldest daughter Margaret, by old Irish custom we would expect him to be a son of Thomas and Margaret (the custom being to name the eldest son and daughter of a marriage after the husband's parents).

(c) This was corroborated by the marriage record in England, naming Michael's father as Thomas.

(d) We would suspect that he had elder brothers John and Nicholas.

9 (a) There are in the Public Records Office, Dublin, lists of householders (for tax purposes) of the period 1825-1830. Searching this for the entire county of Tipperary, this produced a list of places where Reagan / Regan / O'Regan householders were living at the period when Michael and his brothers were born.

(b) The next task was to relate these places to Roman Catholic parishes (since the records sought are parish registers). This produced a list of 15 Catholic parishes where Reagans / Regans / O'Regans were then living; also, for certainty, adjoining parishes were searched as well, making a total of 27 parishes.

10 Irish Catholic registers are available (subject to restrictions) on microfilm in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin. The search of these registers was a total of some 29 hours work. The

essential point to report was that in the entire county of Tipperary there was only one Michael Reagan / Regan / O'Regan born in about 1829/30, and this was corroborated with certainty by the fact that his parents were Thomas and Margaret and he had an elder brother, John. In the registers of the Catholic parish of Ballyporeen, there are recorded as the children of Thomas and Margaret (Murphy) O'Regan of Doolis, a townland in the parish:

July 5, 1819	Elena
June 24, 1821	John
October 29, 1823	Margaret
September 13, 1826	Elizabeth
September 3, 1829	MICHAEL

There are no registers earlier than 1817, so no record of either the eldest brother, Nicholas, nor of the parents' marriage.

It is clear, however, that since Thomas O'Regan's eldest child was born before 1817, then Thomas was born before 1800.

## 11 Surnames and Spelling:

The spelling Reagan is generally unknown in modern Ireland, and such a spelling appears in no Irish telephone directory. The local version is Regan (or O'Regan, the "O" prefix being often dropped) and pronounced "Reegan." Since literacy in this family was marginal, spelling variants are to be expected: "Reagan" was how Michael spelled his name in London in 1852.

# Birth and Baptismal Certificate

Diocese of Waterford & Lismore. Parish of Ballyporeen.

On examination of the Register of Baptisms of above Parish I certify  
that according to it.....Michael Regan.....

was born on.....day of....., and was  
baptised according to the Rites of the Catholic Church on...3rd...day  
of...September, 1829....In the Church of...the Assumption,..  
.....Ballyporeen,.....by the Rev...Martin Redmond, C.C......

Parents.....Thomas Regan (Doolis),.....  
.....Margaret Murphy.....

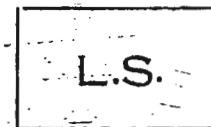
Sponsors.....William Regan.....  
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Confirmed.....No record..... Married.....No record.....

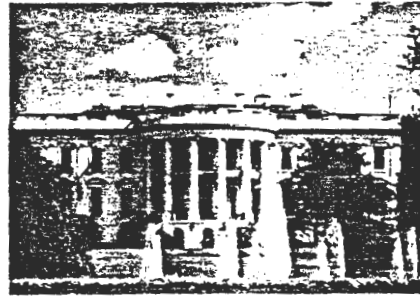
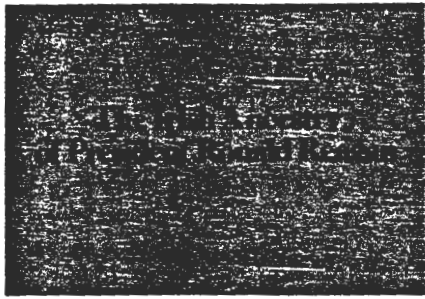
Signed.....In Fanna Condon C.C. PP......

Given this...3rd...day of...September...1981...at.....

.....Ballyporeen, Co. Tipperary, Ireland......







The White House, Washington, D.C.



The Presidential Seal.

## The Link with Ballyporeen

The Irish ancestry of Ronald Reagan, President of the United States of America, and of his brother Neil was established by researchers from Debrett's Peerage Ltd., England. Using standard methods of research, they traced the Reagan roots back to his great-great-grandfather, one Thomas Regan, of Doolis, Ballyporeen, Co. Tipperary.

Most people have little trouble in tracing their ancestry to their grandparents. Either they know them personally in which case there is no problem, or if they are dead older relatives will remember them. Ronald Reagan's grandfather was called John Regan; he died in Fulton, Illinois, in 1889. Using available written records, among them the American census of 1860, it was possible to trace John Reagan's parents' marriage to England in 1852 and to find the record of his own birth in London on 4th June 1854.

John Reagan was the son of Michael Regan, who had married Catherine Mulcahy on 31st October 1852 in Southwark, South London. The English census of 30th March 1851 listed Michael Regan as being aged 21 and a native of Co. Tipperary, Ireland.

Further research in Ireland revealed that he had been born in Doolis, Ballyporeen, Co. Tipperary, and was baptised in the Roman Catholic church at Ballyporeen on 3rd September 1829. He was the youngest son of Thomas Regan and Margaret Murphy, of Doolis. The records went back no further.

The link with Ballyporeen was officially recognised on St. Patrick's

## The Parish Records of Ballyporeen

A parish is a district within a diocese, under the care of a pastor. The parish of Ballyporeen is part of the Diocese of Waterford and Lismore, and forms the north-western boundary of the ancient Irish kingdom of the Déise (pronounced *day-sha*).

Roman Catholic parishes always keep records of Baptisms and Marriages; sometimes records of other church events are also kept. Few parish records in Ireland go back before 1800. For much of the 18th century, the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland was oppressed by Penal Laws, and persecuted Churches tend not to keep records. The laws were eventually relaxed and were finally repealed in 1829.

The Registers of Ballyporeen Parish for Baptisms and Marriages begin in 1817. At that time the parish was known as Templetenny, the name changing to Ballyporeen towards the end of the last century. Accordingly, the Baptismal Register for 1829 is in fact the Templetenny Baptismal Register, the first volume covering 1817-1872.

## Explanation of Text

Roman Catholic parishes have traditionally kept their official records in Latin. Thus, in old registers words like 'Baptism', 'son of', and first names appear in Latin; surnames and place-names are in English. In an apparent effort to use paper sparingly, Latin abbreviations were commonly used e.g. 'Ss' for the Latin word 'Suscipientibus' meaning those who take on the duty of godparent. The entries were always made by priests, writing with quill pens; the ink was a mixture of black powder and water. Different mixes of ink had different lasting properties, so on a particular page in an old register the entries for a few days may be crystal clear, followed by badly faded ones.

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S(uscipientibus) Gulielmus Regan et Catharina

In English, that would read:

On the 3rd I Baptised: Michael, son of Thomas and Margaret Murphy of Doolis;  
Godparents: William Regan and Catharina

The "M+R" was the signature of the Priest who performed the ceremony of Baptism. On some entries he signed his full name, Martin Redmond; if there was less room he signed as M. Redmond; there was little or no room, he used M+R. (See the end of the entry for his full signature "Martinus R

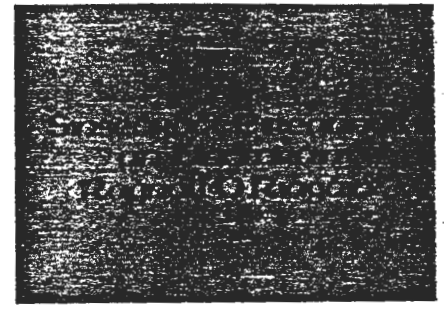
*[Handwritten Latin text from a baptismal register, showing the signature 'M+R' and the full name 'Martinus Redmond']*



Official Seal of Ballyporeen Parish.



Church of the Assumption, Ballyporeen



## Reagan — Regan — O'Regan

In 1829 the people of the Parish of Templetenny were basically speakers of the Irish language, sometimes known as Gaelic. In that language, most surnames have an "O" prefix. Some names retain the "O" in English, some do not — Irish people themselves are not very consistent on this matter to the present day. For example, five of the six children of Thomas Regan and Margaret Murphy of Doolis, are listed in the Templetenny Baptismal Register. In three of the entries the father is called "Regan", in the other two "O'Regan".

There was a tendency at the time to spell phonetically — to spell a word the same way as it sounds. (Americans tend to spell phonetically, so "colour" in English usage, becomes "color" in American).

The Gaelic form of Regan is "Ó Riagáin" (pronounced O'Ree-gawn); it was sometimes spelled as "Ó Réagáin" (O'Ray-gawn). It is therefore a natural development to find Irish-speaking Michael Regan spelling his surname as "Reagan" in the marriage register at Southwark, London; subsequently he and his descendants retained the Reagan spelling.

To show that the spellings were interchangeable in the usage of the time, the same people are sometimes named in the Templetenny Baptismal Register as "Regan" and at other times "Reagan", and these entries were made by highly educated priests.

## The Townland of Doolis

Doolis is a townland of 229 acres, situated about three miles west of the village of Ballyporeen. A "townland" in Ireland is a small territorial unit, useful for identifying the location of a place in agricultural land. The name Doolis is a corruption of the Gaelic "Dubhlios" (pronounced Dhuv-liss), meaning "dark fairy-fort". The townland of Doolis is now uninhabited farmland.

In the 1830s, before the great Famine of the next decade, Doolis had many families; in 1841 it had a population of 129 people. The houses of poor labourers like Thomas Regan would have been constructed of mud and wattles. When they were later abandoned, the rain would simply have washed them back into the soil. No trace would remain.

## Templetenny Graveyard

The graveyard surrounding the ruined church of Templetenny is presumed to be the burial ground of the Regan family of Doolis. It would be quite extraordinary if it were not since Doolis is less than half-a-mile away from the cemetery. None of the existing tombstones seems to have been erected by the Regan family, which may be for either of two reasons. A poor family, which they were, may not have had a tombstone at all; or else, since the family left the area for America, an untended tombstone may gradually have sunk beneath the surface, as many others have done.

An annual Mass is celebrated in the graveyard for the repose of the

## The Ruined Church of Templetenny

Templetenny, "the Church of the Marsh", contains the ruins of an old church building and a graveyard. The precise age of the church is unknown, but it clearly goes back several centuries since it had fallen into disuse by the mid-1700s.

The modern-day Church of the Assumption in Ballyporeen village was built in 1828. Michael Regan would have been among the first to be baptised there a year later, and the family of Thomas Regan would have walked to Mass there from Doolis every Sunday. The church today serves a parish population of about 1,400; in the 1840s the parishioners numbered over 5,000.

Before 1828, the people worshipped in a small thatched-roofed church in Carrigvisteal, about half-a-mile north of Ballyporeen. Before that again, there was an era when they would not have been allowed to have any church, during which time Templetenny Church fell into ruins.

In earlier times, the church in Templetenny was the centre of worship for the district, probably for centuries, and the dead of the area were buried there. It is sacred ground.

Sinsearaíct Éireannac  
an Uachtaráin  
Rágnall Ó Riagáin

Thomas Reagan = Margaret Murphy  
of Doolie, Ballyporeen,  
Co. Tipperary

Michael Reagan = Catherine Mulcahy  
of Doolie, Ballyporeen,  
afterwards of Richham,  
London and afterwards  
of Fairhaven, Illinois

John Reagan = Fannie Gusicli  
of Fulton, Illinois

John Edward Reagan = Nellie Wilson  
of Tampico, Illinois

Ronald Reagan  
President of the United States of America

The Irish Ancestry  
of President Ronald Reagan

The pedigree above, derived from research carried out by  
De Frecht's Irish Ancestry Service, has been recorded in Volume 29,  
folio 40 of the series of Registered Pedigrees preserved in this Office.

Overleaf: A facsimile of facing pages in the  
Baptismal Register of Templemore — later  
Ballyporeen — Parish for 1829. The  
Baptism of Michael Reagan, President



## **The Family of Thomas Regan of Doolis**

**T**homas Regan, a labourer, was married to Margaret Murphy sometime prior to 1817. They had six children, three boys and three girls: Nicholas, born before 1817; Ellen (b. 1819), John (b. 1821), Margaret (b. 1823), Elizabeth (b. 1826) and Michael (b. 1829).

Nicholas, the eldest, accompanied his youngest brother Michael to London, where he was a witness at Michael's marriage to Catherine Mulcahy in 1852. The marriage certificate mentioned that the father, Thomas, was by now deceased. Both Nicholas and John later worked for their brother Michael in Fairhaven, Illinois, and apparently never married.

The subsequent history of the three girls, who presumably remained in Ireland and married, is unknown at present.

# A TOUCH OF THE GREEN IN THE WHITE HOUSE

by

JACK McCARTHY



On a biting, blustery Irish afternoon last December I was chatting in a remote Donegal seaside pub with Paddy Joe, its affable knowledgeable owner, about the election of Ronald Reagan to the U.S. presidency. In the course of our talk, I casually commented that a number of American politicians were of Irish extraction.

"Aye, you mean your presidents", publican Paddy Joe promptly corrected me.

Before I could get a word in edgewise, he was counting off no less than a dozen U.S. presidents of Irish origin. Besides, he was naming the respective Irish counties from which their ancestors had emigrated to the States.

Paddy Joe's presidential list included Ronald Reagan (Co. Tipperary), Jimmy Carter (Antrim), Gerald Rudolph Ford (Cork), Richard Milhous Nixon (Kildare), John Fitzgerald Kennedy (Wexford),

Woodrow Wilson (Derry), William McKinley (Fermanagh), Grover Cleveland (Down), Chester Alan Arthur (Antrim), Ulysses Simpson Grant (Donegal), James Buchanan (Armagh), and Andrew Jackson (Tyrone).

After rattling off his dozen American-Irish presidents, Paddy Joe explained that the ancestors of five of the twelve — those of Reagan, Ford, Nixon, Kennedy and Grant — had come from the 26 counties. Those of the remaining seven — Carter, Wilson, McKinley, Cleveland, Arthur, Buchanan and Jackson — had their roots in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland, "now, as usual, is having everlasting troubles, but is still cozy with imperial Great Britain".

Then Paddy Joe took a quick glance around his pub to see if any of his patrons were listening in on our conversation. Evidently, some were, because he leaned across the bar towards me and in a characteristic

Celtic whisper continued with:

"Of the whole dozen of those Irish presidents of your country that I mentioned, only John Fitzgerald Kennedy — God rest his grand soul — was a Catholic. Mind ye now, I've absolutely nothing against the eleven others because they're not of our Faith. Every one of the eleven, like JFK himself, is a great credit to his Irish forefathers".

According to Paddy Joe, the religious preference of the seven U.S. presidents whose antecedents came from Northern Ireland likely was Presbyterian. For back in the 1640s, when Cromwell invaded Ireland, he created the Northern Ireland plantation by offering land to the Presbyterians in Scotland. They accepted by the hundreds.

"These Scotch Presbyterians who settled in Ulster", said Paddy Joe, "and their descendants down to this day and very hour, have never been over-fond of the Pope".

4/13/92 - from "An Irish Magazine"

Recently, while in Belfast en route to the airport, our bus passed through a devastated area where graffiti read: "No Pope Here!" Underneath it, some wag had added: "Lucky Pope!"

The knowing Paddy Joe also proudly proclaimed that the present White House, of which the original was burned by the British in the War of 1812, was redesigned and reconstructed by James Hoban, a Catholic architect from Kilkenny. "The man was a perfectionist", Paddy Joe concluded, and "the Reagans will enter the White House as though it was just built".

Perhaps I should have mentioned that an Irish American contractor, John McShain, had made extensive repairs on the White House in the 1940s. But in a remote Donegal pub, one contradicts its publican at the risk of his own health, or worse still, possible bleak banishment from its premises.

Interestingly, one of the larger Irish estates which Cromwell confiscated, he gave to his fellow warrior, Admiral Sir William Penn, the father of William Penn, famed founder of Pennsylvania and a fervent Quaker. In the 1660s, the younger Penn managed his father's estate located in Cork and was instrumental in persuading Quakers from England and elsewhere to settle in Ireland.

President Nixon's Quaker side, the Milhouses, were probably among those who followed Penn to Ireland. While he was still in the White House, Nixon visited the Milhous family grave in Timahoe, Co. Kildare. His Timahoe hosts presented the president with the gift of an Irish setter. He showed his delight and appreciation by naming the setter Timahoe, and taking the dog back with him to live in the White House.

Incidentally, just about three miles offshore in the Atlantic Ocean from Paddy Joe's pub lies Arranmore Island where President U.S. Grant's forbears came from. A lovely, lively, jolly spot. President Grant's people left Arranmore to go to America in 1630. But any inquiries about them by Yank tourists are invariably answered by the locals as though the Grants left just a month ago.

Strabane is the home-town of President Wilson's ancestors. A great grandfather of Wilson's was an apprentice to Strabane's famed printer, Belknap, who emigrated to Philadelphia in Colonial Days and printed the Declaration of Independence.

According to Debrett's Peerage Limited, the London-based ancestry outfit, President Reagan's great grandfather, Michael Reagan, was born in 1829 in Doolis, a tiny hamlet,

now uninhabited, outside the town Ballyporeen, Co. Tipperary. Michael was baptized in the Catholic Church Ballyporeen, which still has baptismal records. On those Church records, Michael's father's name appears as "O'Regan and Regan". During the great Irish famine of the 1840s, Michael moved to London where he married Katherine Mulca from Co. Tipperary. In 1858 he emigrated to America and took farming in Illinois.

Like nearly all the Irish, the president, according to Debrett's, is related to one of the many legendary ancient Celtic kings. His royal ancestor is Brian Boru. Shortly after the presidential election, John O'Farrell, longtime publican in Ballyporeen, named a lounge after his cousin, the new president of the United States.

Above the door of the lounge is a 16-foot long lighted sign that bears the Reagan royal Irish crest and proclaims: "The Ronald Reagan" in huge green Gaelic lettering. "It fits in perfectly", says cousin O'Farrell proudly of his sign.

After reading of the grand opening of cousin O'Farrell's Reagan lounge, Paddy Joe dourly predicted: "Aye, now that Ron Reagan is in the White House, he'll soon be discovering that he has many, many Irish relatives whom he never knew existed before".

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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

Date: 1/25/84

To: Kathy Osborne

Here is my Irish file. Also, as we previously discussed, Fr. Eanna Condon (who put together the Ballyporeen brochure) is to be avoided. When he came to the W.H. a couple of years ago, a few of us in this office had lunch with him. God forgive me, I mean no disrespect to the clergy, but this guy is a rootin-tootin hustler and self promoter. "Nuff said.

KATHERINE SHEPHERD  
Presidential Correspondence  
Office  
Room 98, x7610



## Michael Reagan Puts Down Roots in Illinois

BY JOHANNES LAURITSEN

Michael Reagan, the greatgrandfather of President Ronald Reagan, was the migrant pioneer who brought this branch of the family to America. He led a great movement that was to enrich America's growth brought about by the endurance, strength and courage of those who took part in the great Irish migration to the New World.

Michael was baptised 18 December 1829, according to his baptismal record written in Latin in the Ballyporeen Catholic Church in the southwest of County Tipperary in Ireland. The Topographical Dictionary of Ireland identified Ballyporeen as a village in the barony of Iffa and Offa West in County Tipperary. Its Catholic parish was in the Diocese of Waterford and Lismore. Baptismal records first appeared in the parish register in 1817.

Michael's father was Thomas O'Regan, a laborer, who had married Margaret Murphy in or before 1817. Thomas appears as both "Regan" and O'Regan in the church records of the parish of Father Condon. Thomas had died by 1852.

Michael was the youngest of six children appearing in the parish records:

Nicholas born in or before 1817  
Elena baptised 5 July 1819  
John baptised 24 June 1821  
Margaret baptised 29 October 1823  
Elizabeth baptised 13 September 1826  
Michael baptised 3 September 1829

The family was poor and landless, and since Catholics were forbidden, by the laws formulated by Edmund Burke in England, to live within five miles of a corporate town, they lived in the area of Doolis, a small community just west of Ballyporeen. The area, below the Galtee Mountains, was damp and unimpressive, and is now largely uninhabited, "a tangle of briar and bog" where cattle graze.

#### CONDITIONS IN IRELAND

In Ireland, the labor of children was important on the large farms owned by English and Irish landlords, and the Catholic Church encouraged large families. Growth of the population had led to a critical ratio of land per person, in a country highly dependent on agriculture.

The families of the poor living on the great estates, increased the political power of the landowners, who controlled the votes of their tenants. Open ballots made it impossible for a man to conceal how he had voted, and a displeased landlord could at will deprive any tenant of his livelihood.

Wealthy Irish and English landowners were not in touch with the miseries of the poor and had contempt for their apparent ignorance and backwardness. The owners were often absent from their estates which were run by managers who, for their own gain, exploited the tenants, as well as getting as much as possible for the owners. The poor relied on land for their survival, renting minute plots which could easily be taken from them since laws favored the land owners. If the poor tenant could not pay his rent, the owner could not only deprive him of his land but could also take his livestock, what-



## *The Invincible Irish*

in 1817

5 July 1819

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## *The Invincible Irish*

77

ever small crops he might be growing, or anything else he  
might have of value.

To keep his cattle from being stolen, the peasant would  
take them into his rude cottage at night where they would  
occupy half of the room while the family slept on the floor  
at the other end on straw or rushes.

An on-the-scene description of life in Doolis was written  
by William O'Brien, who became a Westminster member of  
parliament from North Cork. He wrote of a Widow Conlon,  
who would have been a neighbor of the O'Regan family and  
described a "starved-looking and half-naked old woman, bare-  
footed and shivering with age and pain." Her cabin gave him  
"an impression of sickness and horror that fills me with loath-  
ing. . . . The unfortunate creature had built it herself of sods  
and stones and bits of timber were fastened against the walls  
here and there to prevent it from falling to pieces. An iron  
pot was the entire furniture. There were stones for seats, a  
mound of wild plants for a bedstead. The approaches to the  
house were swimming in liquid manure and mud."

Even if it had been within his means, there was little in-  
centive for the peasant to improve his home since at any time  
the landlord could move him out of it.

The standard of living among the poor had always been  
low in Ireland but it reached disaster after potatoes became  
the principal agricultural product. The blight of the potato  
that caused crop failure actually began in 1845, and in 1847,  
the crop failed for the third consecutive year, this time total-  
ly. The resulting famine caused the largest movement of  
migration from Ireland to that time. Among those who could  
not leave, the survivors were so weakened and helpless that  
they could scarcely attend to the dead, who were buried in  
trenches or left to lie where they fell. No accurate account  
could be kept of either deaths or departures, but millions  
died of starvation and disease while other millions fled from  
Ireland by whatever means possible.

While the Irish were suffering from starvation, the English

were importing for their own use, and for profit, grains grown in Ireland, and passing ever more stringent laws taxing and restricting the Catholic poor. Laws were passed committing them to hard labor for vagrancy if they wandered about, seeking food.

The peasantry had no way to protect themselves from economic exploitation, and they tended increasingly to take the law into their own hands. Over all of Ireland, the urgent desperation of hunger had caused a shifting of social problems from civil disobedience to stealing for survival. Theft of cattle and pigs, and stealing foods from vessels in the harbors became common. Rioting was a serious problem throughout the 1840s and as time went by, it became widespread in protest of the stringent laws and restrictions that kept the poor from helping themselves.

County Tipperary was most active in resistance and the "lawless" were being arrested and imprisoned. Arrest for refusing to help peace officers and attempting to free those in the hands of the police grew in numbers in 1847 through 1849. In Tipperary, arrests of rioters, and for unlawful assembly had reached amazing proportions by 1849. Amid these pressures and threats, young men in droves were leaving the country and going to London, to whatever jobs could be found. Many had the intention of "earning the cost of the road to America."

#### MICHAEL REAGAN LEAVES IRELAND

The timing of Michael Reagan's leaving Ireland coincided with this accumulation of threats and stresses in his home country. He had as well a personal reason for leaving his home area. Doolis offered little hope for a young man's future or for furnishing the needs of a young family. The crude stone huts offered no warmth or inspiration, and there was no work that provided security.

Michael took with him to London a local girl, Catherine Mulcahy. Irish sources say that the name Mulcahy originated



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London a local girl, Catherine at the name Mulcahy originated

in south Tipperary, and was derived from St. Cathach. Catherine was born about 1822-1823, and was the daughter of Patrick Mulcahy, a laborer. She and Michael were married 30 October 1852 at St. George's Roman Catholic Church, Southwark, London. Michael was working as a soap maker. Their first child Thomas was named after his father's father, and was born 15 May 1852 at Peckham, and baptised 16 May 1852 at St. George's.

The marriage certificate was witnessed by Michael's brother Nicholas, who signed the document with his mark. The registrar gave Nicholas's surname "Regan" while Michael signed himself "Reagan," a form of spelling not used in Ireland. Literacy was marginal in these times, and Nicholas, and also Catherine, were listed in later records as illiterate while another brother John and Michael could read and write. In Ireland, Michael and John apparently had the benefit of "hedge row schools," where the teacher worked in the fields with the families and taught the children surreptitiously.

Two other children were born in London to Michael and Catherine. John Michael was born 29 May 1854 at Peckham and was baptised 4 June 1854 at St. George's, Southwark. He was to be the father of John Edward Reagen, and grandfather of President Ronald Reagan. Margaret, named after Michael's mother, was born in 1856. Following these, the fourth child, William, was born about 1859 in Illinois in the midlands of the United States where the family had gone by way of Canada.

## MIGRATION TO AMERICA

Migration in these times was a hazardous undertaking for the poor. Liverpool was the leading British port, but many Irish left from Cork and Galway. In addition to these points of departure, countless small craft of every variety and condition left from almost every small port on the west coast of Ireland on the way to Canada and to the United States. Canadian ships which had brought lumber or other cargo



across the Atlantic would make extra profit by sailing back with passengers packed aboard.

In 1819, the United States, at last alarmed by the loss of life of immigrants on shipboard, due to overcrowding and lack of concern for passengers' well being, had passed stringent laws regarding immigration ships, regulating the number of passengers that could be crowded aboard. Ship's officers were required to account for every passenger, whether dying at sea, or at last landing on shore. The passenger lists presented to customs authorities contained the name, age, sex and occupation of each individual. The first official statistics of immigration began with this law. Even with these restrictions, the poor in steerage still found the journey fraught with discomfort and hazards, for they occupied dark and confining quarters, rat infested, filthy and with stagnant air.

Ships bound for Canada had no such regulations, and countless lives were lost for lack of food and care for the Irish sad and weakened condition. The ships carrying these emigrants were nicknamed "coffin ships" because of the great loss of life at sea. The starving people who survived the passage were quarantined in great numbers on landing, where many died and were buried namelessly in mass graves on Canadian soil. On Partridge Island in the mouth of the St. Lawrence River, the dead were buried in trenches. Grosse Island in the St. Lawrence was the burial place of thousands. More than 20,000 unmarked graves lie along the borders of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. Families would be wiped out without a trace.

Loss of life could come about during the voyage, or shortly after arrival, in hospitals where the travelers had been taken for care. When they finally reached their destination, famine-wrought disease frequently wiped out the pilgrimage.

The young family of Michael Reagan would have been more fortunate than many of his suffering countrymen. With his job in England, his children would have been fed, and no doubt, from meager wages, money would have been put

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away for supplies for the voyage. The Reagan emigration  
seems to have been no random journey to "the land of the  
young which lies in the west."

Many Irish immigrants settled on the east coast of Amer-  
ica, taking low paying jobs involving hard labor. Others  
worked their way inland, finding jobs on new railroad lines  
and canals, on frontiers where they would at last make their  
homes. Surviving in difficult times had given them strength  
and endurance and made possible their survival in new areas  
where their vigor, ingenuity and resourcefulness contributed  
to developing the new nation beyond measure.

The Reagans were not sailing to whatever port they could  
reach in desperation, for apparently they did not linger on  
the east coast. Instead they seemed to have gone purposefully  
to a prearranged location, going to Illinois near the center of  
the United States.

#### THE REAGAN NAME IN ILLINOIS

The family was not the first of that name to reach Illinois.  
The 1850 census of the state listed eight households with the  
surname spelled Reagan. They were:

Ellen Reagan	Hancock County
Henry Reagan	Clark County
James Reagan	Madison County
John Reagan	Clark County
John Regan	La Salle County
Joshua Reagan	Macon County
Marie Reagan	LaSalle County
Celia Reagan	St. Clair County

Reference is made to other spelling of the name: Ragan,  
Ragen, Raggen, Ragin, Regan, Rigan. All could be vari-  
ations of the same surname, ascribed by the whims or abilities  
of various census takers.

"Regan" was found in the counties of Morgan, DeKalb,  
Stark, Winnebago, Madison, Kane, Cook, Jo Davies, and  
Clark counties.

"Regen" was found in Adams and Hancock counties in 1850 and a "Michl" Regan appeared in Cook County in that year. How many, if any of these, had ties with Michael's family is not known.

#### FAIR HAVEN, CARROLL COUNTY, ILLINOIS

In 1860, in the census of Fair Haven Township, Carroll County, is found positive identification of Michael's family with this information: Michael "Reigan," age 25, born in Ireland, was a farmer with real estate valued at \$1120 and personal property valued at \$150. His wife Catherine, also born in Ireland was 30 years old. Their children appeared:

Thomas	age 7	born in England
John	age 5	born in England
Margaret	age 3	born in England
William	age 1	born in Illinois

In Michael's household were also two of his brothers. Nicholas was 35, listed as a farm laborer, born in Ireland. John P. was 30, also born in Ireland.

In the 1880 census, Nicholas appeared with his own household, and he is now 60, and a farmer. His wife Maria was 42. Their children appeared:

Maggie	age 18	born 1862 in Ohio
Thomas	age 17	born 1863 in Ohio
John	age 15	born 1865 in Illinois
Ellen	age 12	born 1868 in Illinois
(Michael?) Maeshal	age 6	born 1874 in Illinois

The record of the children born in Ohio is not explained. Perhaps he married a widow. His wife Maria was from Ireland.

#### LAND OWNERSHIP IN ILLINOIS

Michael's arrival in Illinois was between 1856 and 1859, and it is interesting to speculate how, in the 1860 census he



## *The Invincible Irish*

Adams and Hancock counties in  
appeared in Cook County in that  
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### ROLL COUNTY, ILLINOIS

Fair Haven Township, Carroll  
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### SHIP IN ILLINOIS

is was between 1856 and 1859,  
ulate how, in the 1860 census he

## *The Invincible Irish*

83

could appear as the owner of real estate valued at \$1120. This was a substantial amount for a man who could not have brought more than subsistence with him when he came. A survey of the land ownership laws may provide an explanation.

The United States Government had offered land for sale to settlers by 1796, but they offered more than a settler could farm or pay for. Their offer was for 640 acres as a unit which sold for not less than \$2.00 an acre. After revisions and reductions, by 1820, land could be purchased in 80 acre tracts, with the cost down to \$1.25 an acre.

In 1832 the minimum was reduced to 40 acres with price still at \$1.25 an acre. This was followed by an important innovation that actually made it possible for anyone willing to work to become the owner of 40 acres without any money involved. Between 1801 and 1841, sixteen "preemption" laws were passed. These laws allowed the actual settler to possess the land without cost, as opposed to purchase by speculators.

The land laws were of great aid to the settler on the farthest edge of the frontier. He had acreage he could manage most economically and his own labor paid for his land.

The preemption system and the Homestead Act, providing "free" homes to settlers served the purpose of the government, increasing national prosperity with a new basis for taxation in the increased value of the land.

There were thousands of acres still in wilderness, from which the settler could choose his acreage without cost. Four years after he began cultivation, he owned his house and his land, and during that time the profits of his labor were his.

### MICHAEL REAGAN AS FARMER

Which of the family was first in the area is not known, nor the order of their arrival, but in a Carroll County directory of 1878, five Reagan families lived within three adjoining sections of land in the southern part of Fairhaven township in southern Carroll County, Illinois. A map of the county

shows these sections just south of and adjoining the post office of Fair Haven and a nearby school. These families would have become land owners through the benefits of the pre-emption law, their time and labor providing the attainment of their goal.

The five adjoining families, all now spelled Reagan, were:

Section 21	Reagan, Michael
	Reagan, John
	Reagan, Thomas
Section 22	Reagan, John
Section 23	Reagan, N.

Thomas, oldest son of Michael, would now be about 25 years old and his brother John would be about 23. Neither of them appeared in Michael's household in the 1880 census. It is reasonable to assume that both Thomas and John in Section 21 would be the sons of Michael located there, now with households of their own. John appearing in Section 22, and N. Reagan in Section 23, would be the adults in Michael's household in the 1860 census, without doubt his brothers.

Michael's daughter Margaret married Orson Baldwin, a store keeper of Bennett, Iowa. She was to play an important role in the family, bringing up her orphaned nephew, John Edward Reagan, father of President Ronald Reagan.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF ILLINOIS

The upper area of Illinois lies between Lake Michigan in the east and the Mississippi river which forms the western boundary of the state. The state of Illinois contains 56,400 square miles. The area of Ireland is 26,600 square miles with a central plateau surrounded by isolated groups of hills and mountains.

Compared to Ireland as a beleaguered island, Illinois with its rich farmland, was part of then 3,022,387 acres of the United States, through which any citizen could freely travel. The awesome size and grandeur of this great expanse with

## *The Invincible Irish*

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## *The Invincible Irish*

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mountains, rivers, and vast plains might make Ireland's be-  
loved hills and streams seem diminished. But certainly the  
air of freedom would be most impressive and welcome. A  
man could choose his place of dwelling and occupation, edu-  
cate his children in public schools open to all, attend the  
established church of his choice, or even start a new one if  
he felt so inspired. In America, the citizen was free to say or  
publish what he thought of the government, or any American  
institution. His right to vote gave self government to the citi-  
zens of each small county, each state, and to the total union  
of states.

Migration to Illinois bordering the Mississippi River took  
place in three general waves in the settlement of the frontier.  
First, explorers, trappers and hunters came through with no  
intention of improving the country.

The second wave was made up of "squatters," occupying  
without trying to own, a tract of land, living in rude cabins  
and growing food in a small area, depending mostly upon  
hunting and the natural vegetation to provide food.

The third group meant to stay, and they acquired title to  
the land and developed homes that would be passed on to  
their children. The dreams of the pioneers were equaled by  
nature's beauty and generous offering. The promise was un-  
limited, but the first struggles of the newcomer were gruel-  
ling and progress was slow and hard-earned. On arrival, their  
welcome could be fearsome, no habitation waiting for them,  
no house or shelter and scant means of providing food. If  
they came singly, they were strangers in a wilderness, and  
their neighbors might be miles away. But the newcomers, in-  
cluding the Irish, had strength, ingenuity and resourcefulness  
and lost no time adapting their lives to their new environ-  
ment. These strengths provided their survival.

## MAKING A HOME IN AMERICA

The first task of the new arrival would be to build a shelter  
for his family. In Ireland, the farm cottages were made of



stones, stacked by hand with the chinks filled with grass or mud. They were cold and offered little comfort. Since the landlord could, almost at will, dispossess his tenant and take possession of his property, there was little incentive to make the farm house durable or comfortable.

Here in the settler's new location, plentiful timber made possible a dry and comfortable house made of stacked layers of squared logs, notched so corners dovetailed, with clay closing the chinks and corners to make it secure from cold, marauding small animals and insects. The lack of windows could have an advantage; the warm air did not escape. The blazing fireplace in winter and in the evenings lighted the house.

The settler could freely chose the materials about him for home building and the wood made the making of furniture possible as well, in contrast to Irish cottages where stones for seats and rushes stacked for beds might be the only furniture. Here boxes that brought provisions could be used for chairs. Or sections of tree trunks could be rolled into the house and set on end for chairs or used to make a rustic table, with a few boards nailed on top to provide space for nourishing meals. A bench could be made from a log, hewn square. Beds were rough frames covered with mattresses filled with corn husks or straw. Strong sticks could make legs for a table made of a split log, and a smaller version made sturdy stools.

There were two essential tools for life on the frontier; a long handled axe and a rifle. The settler used his axe not only to make his home and his furniture, but to shape farm implements and wooden kitchen ware. All his needs were self-provided, except for iron and salt. His gun was not only used for hunting game, but also as protection from hostile strangers, so that the homeowner could secure his property.

At first arrival, cooking might be done out of doors on open fires, or stone ovens could be built. When cabins were completed, there would likely be a fireplace on the floor at the end of the building, its crude chimney made from stones gathered from the land and walled together with clay. The

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fireplace was deep to keep the fire from threatening the house,  
and a large section of the floor near the fire would be paved  
with small stones.

Once his family was sheltered, the settler turned his atten-  
tion to the land. In the Fair Haven area where the Reagans  
settled, there were scattered groves and trees, mostly scrubby  
black oak. To clear his land, the settler felled the trees and  
with the help of neighbors, rolled them into a pile for burn-  
ing. Or, if he had to work alone, he could kill the trees by  
girdling the bark about three feet from the ground and let  
the trees decay. He could plow around them and seed the  
ground to corn. Beans, melons, pumpkin and squash were  
planted in the corn rows, with the family watching carefully  
their subsistence as it grew. In the rich black soil with rain  
usually plentiful, grass for livestock and crops was assured.

But there was competition for the crops. The children were  
called upon to scare away "millions" of birds of every kind  
who waited to scratch up the seed in the spring planting.  
Blackbirds, crows, pigeons, wild turkey, snipe, quail, prairie  
chickens and ducks were part of literally clouds of birds that  
could fill the air. The birds would be waiting again to help  
harvest the ripe grain, and once more the family would have  
to be vigilant. Men and boys would hunt the raccoons who  
came foraging in the fields at night.

In Ireland, the peasants were forbidden to take for them-  
selves any wild game or birds, all of which were the property  
of the landlord. The Irish newcomer must have been truly  
amazed at the kind and quantity of wild life that thrived in  
the woods and fields with a plentiful water supply. Deer, bear,  
panther, fox, wolf and wild cat were abundant. Buffalo, roam-  
ing the prairie lands, could come into the area. Beaver, otter,  
and mink still survived along the streams although the early  
hunters had reduced their numbers. Two men in five weeks  
killed 1600 muskrats, the pelts of which brought \$200 to each  
man.

Fish were abundant in the streams, and could be had by

anyone diligent enough to catch them. Another creature made its presence known. Rattlesnakes hibernated in dens in winter and came out when the early spring sun warmed the ground. A group of fishermen became conscious of a stirring on the ground about them, and discovered they were not alone. They laid down their fishing poles and took up sticks, and killed one hundred and ninety rattlers, no doubt forgetting to return to fishing again on that particular expedition. One of the early settlers built his "house" eight or ten feet up a tree to escape the company of snakes. The pioneers knew of a herb called "Rattlesnake Master," for the cure of snake bite.

The atmosphere in mid America would be a great change from the mists and the damp winds blowing across Ireland from the sea on the west, moderating the winter and providing cool summers. In Illinois, the air was clear, dry and invigorating. Storms could be impressive with sharp lightning and great rumblings of thunder with torrents of rain, all of which could come up quickly. The transition from one season to another was often abrupt, and autumn colors would produce a show of woods aflame with early frosts that were keenly cold.

Winter varied in severity. The first settlers arrived with teams of oxen, and the first year the oxen were turned loose to forage in the rushes near the river and survived the winter well. A few years later, winter showed another disposition and the Mississippi froze so solidly that a farmer drove across it with a team of oxen pulling a load of lumber. Winter nights could be bitterly cold but beautiful with a clear sky and brilliant stars.

Peat was available in Ireland, but the poor tenant might not be allowed a plentiful supply. Here energy and diligence were the only requirements to provide stacks of wood for the taking, to warm the cabin and cook the food.

Springtime might seem long in coming; the pioneer had a saying, "When the days begin to lengthen, then the cold be-



catch them. Another creature rattlesnakes hibernated in dens in the early spring sun warmed the men became conscious of a stirring, and discovered they were not fishing poles and took up sticks, and ninety rattlers, no doubt for again on that particular expedition built his "house" eight or ten company of snakes. The pioneers "lesnake Master," for the cure of

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gins to strengthen." But both spring and autumn would have a number of fine days in spite of being the rainiest seasons.

Here as the seasons passed the pioneer lived in a pleasant land with abundant food, a secure home, schools for his children and opportunity for his descendants to become great beyond the wildest dreams of his humble beginnings. Thus a new kind of man was generated by the American experience, as shown in the progress from Michael Reagan, poor but diligent in a new land, to his great grandson, able and confident serving as president of that land—Ronald Wilson Reagan.







Doolis: the pre-famine ordnance survey map showing 12 houses in the townland. But, according to the parish records, there were 38 families there at that time

# How the root-finders reached Ballyporeen

By LIAM MOHER

**BALLYPOREEN** did not claim Ronald Reagan — he was thrust upon it.

The story of the three strangers who walked into O'Farrell's bar on the morning of Saturday, November 8, has now been reported across the English-speaking world.

One of them was Hugh Peskett, the chief genealogist of Debrett Ancestry Research in London.

The presidential root-finders had reached the end of the line, but for Ballyporeen it was the start of something akin to a rebirth. "Suddenly," says John O'Farrell, "we were on the world map."

Being from Ballyporeen no longer involves a somewhat defensive explanation of where you came from, or of how to get there.

But how did the genealogists get there? The route is given by Debrett in a memorandum entitled "The Search for Ronald Reagan's Roots":

## (A) In America

1 Research began with modern records in Illinois courthouses and National Archives, Washington. According to The Current Biography Yearbook, 1967, Ronald Reagan was born on February 6, 1911 at Tampico, White-side Co., Illinois (120 miles west of Chicago). Elder brother J. Neil Reagan, son of John Edward and Nellie (Wilson) Reagan, the father a

first generation Irish Catholic, the mother an English / Scottish background Protestant.

2 Research shows that they married on November 8, 1904, at the Catholic church of the Immaculate Conception, Fulton, Ill. The father was a well-known alcoholic and the mother, brought up the children as strict Protestants, despite the Catholic marriage (see Ronald Reagan's 1965 autobiography).

## 3 U.S. Census 1900 records:

(a) John Regan (sic), Ronald's father, born July, 1883 in Illinois, father born in England, dry goods sales-



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man, live with his aunt Margaret (Reagan) Baldwin, wife of dry goods merchant Orson G. Baldwin in Bennett, Iowa, she being listed as born April 1856 in England. Both parents born in Ireland, immigrated 1858.

(b) Nellie Wilson in Fulton, Ill, born July 1883, the youngest of seven children of English-born Mary Wilson, widow of a man born in Scotland.

4 To cut a long story short, the U.S. trail leads back, using entirely conventional vital records, census, to the earliest record of the family in America. This is

the U.S. Census 1860 listing the household in Carroll County (north-west Illinois). Michael Reagan was a farmer, owning real estate worth the then significant figure of \$1,120. His wife was Catherine (maiden name Mulcahy, learnt from later death certificates) and they had children: Thomas (age 7), John (age 5), Margaret (age 3), all three born in England, and William (age 1) and born in Illinois (there was also a later daughter, Mary, born in 1865, not listed here). Michael and his wife were listed (ages very approximate only) as aged 25 and 30, and both born in Ireland. As well, they had living with them, Nicholas Regan (age 35) and John P. Regan (age 30) who were both labourers born in Ireland (it later emerged that this was literate Michael, the farmer, employing his illiterate elder brothers as labourers).

5 We knew the family had immigrated in 1858, and the most probable route was via Montreal and the Great Lakes, as then, Canada being like Ireland in the British empire, immigration was easier by that route.

## (B) In England

6 English research came next as we knew that the Regans had had three children born there. The marriage record was found of Michael Regan (son of Thomas, a deceased labourer) and Catherine Mulcahy (daughter of Patrick, a labourer), married on October 31, 1852 at St. George's

Catholic Cathedral in Southwark, South London. Both gave their address as Bexley Street in Peckham (where there was an Irish community). Witnesses included Nicholas Regan (sic). Michael could sign his name, and he signed "Reagan"; neither Catherine nor Nicholas could write and the priest entered Nicholas's name as "Regan" (the more usual spelling). The baptism registers of that church recorded their son Thomas born before their



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marriage on May 15 and baptised on May 16, 1852, and their son John (Ronald Reagan's grandfather), born on May 29 and baptised on June 4, 1854.

7 The English census of March 30, 1851, listed both Michael Regan and Catherine Mulcahy as aged 21 and 28 respectively, and both born in Co. Tipperary, Ireland.

## (C) In Ireland

8 We were able to begin research in Ireland with the following briefing:

(a) We were seeking Michael Regan, born in Co. Tipperary ca. 1829/30.  
(b) Knowing he named his eldest son

Thomas and his eldest daughter Margaret, by old Irish custom we would expect him to be a son of Thomas and Margaret (the custom being to name the eldest son and daughter of a marriage after the husband's parents).

(c) This was corroborated by the marriage record in England, naming Michael's father as Thomas.

(d) We would suspect that he had elder brothers John and Nicholas.

9 (a) There are in the Public Records Office, Dublin, lists of householders (for tax purposes) of the period 1825-1830. Searching this for the entire county of Tipperary, this produced a list of places where Regan / Regan / O'Regan householders were living at the period when Michael and his brothers were born.

(b) The next task was to relate these places to Roman Catholic parishes (since the records sought are parish registers). This produced a list of 15 Catholic parishes where Regans / Regans / O'Regans were then living; also, for certainty, adjoining parishes were searched as well, making a total of 27 parishes.

10 Irish Catholic registers are available (subject to restrictions) on microfilm in the National Library of Ireland, Dublin. The search of these registers was a total of some 29 hours work. The

essential point to report was that in the entire county of Tipperary there was only one Michael Regan / Regan / O'Regan born in about 1829/30, and this was corroborated with certainty by the fact that his parents were Thomas and Margaret and he had an elder brother, John. In the registers of the Catholic parish of Ballyporeen, there are recorded as the children of Thomas and Margaret (Murphy) O'Regan of Doolis, a townland in the parish:

July 5, 1819	Elena
June 24, 1821	John
October 29, 1823	Margaret
September 13, 1826	Elizabeth
September 3, 1829	MICHAEL

There are no registers earlier than 1817, so no record of either the eldest brother, Nicholas, nor of the parents' marriage. It is clear, however, that since Thomas O'Regan's eldest child was born before 1817, then Thomas was born before 1800.

## 11 Surnames and Spelling:

The spelling Regan is generally unknown in modern Ireland, and such a spelling appears in no Irish telephone directory. The local version is Regan (or O'Regan, the "O" prefix being often dropped) and pronounced "Reegan." Since literacy in this family was marginal, spelling variants are to be expected: "Reagan" was how Michael spelled his name in London in 1852.