

Finding Family – October 2017

Maggie's Wedding Picture

By Chris Burditt



Maggie McCristal and John McDonald were married in 1900 in New York.
Submitted photo

It started with an old wedding photograph of my Irish grandmother. Her name was Maggie McCristal. Her husband was John McDonald. The black and white photograph was taken in December 1900 by a studio in Babylon,

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Long Island, NY. I wanted to know more about her, so I started doing genealogical research.

First I ordered her marriage certificate. That gave me the names of her parents. Next I ordered her death certificate and learned she died in 1911 from TB. My mother Margaret was only 7 years old. My mother would spend the following 11 years in an orphanage. From the 1900 US Census, I found Maggie's birth year and the names of two of her Irish siblings. All three were working at the same mental hospital. The census also showed the year she passed through Ellis Island — 1896. I verified that date of entry on the Statue of Liberty/Ellis Island website. The site even provided a picture of her ship and its history.

Through my subscription to [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com), I located Maggie's birthplace — Drumduff, Tyrone, Northern Ireland, UK. But I found it indirectly: while Maggie had no online birth information, her brother, Michael, did. So I provided his information to an online vital records service in Tyrone. That was enough! In a week I had Maggie's birth certificate.

The Irish Consulate in San Francisco helped me apply for Irish citizenship by descent. As a result, my name is now recorded in "The Book of Births." And I was also able to receive an EU passport issued by the Republic of Ireland.

In June 2015 I went to Northern Ireland. My guide was Hugh Ward, a Drumduff native and professional genealogist. Hugh and his wife also operate a B&B, where I stayed for two nights. Our first stop was the church cemetery where Maggie's parents were buried. And their parents as well! Our next stop was the church where Maggie was baptized in 1878. Drumduff had been center for growing and processing flax, the raw material for Irish linens. Today it's a postcard-perfect countryside of green rolling hills.

Last summer I traveled to Long Island, NY, where I was born. Before I left, I reserved a ticket for the ferry to Ellis Island. I was only able to cover the exhibits on the first floor in the time there. I left a whole second floor

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unexplored. So my next visit will cover that and the Irish immigrant museum in New York City.

Another tool now available for genealogy research is DNA testing. I took Ancestry's "autosomal" test to find both paternal and maternal family connections. I found American relatives descended from Maggie's sister Rose. This was a surprise for me. I hadn't realized that she came to New York in 1891, a year before Ellis Island opened, and five years before Maggie left Ireland. Rose married soon after arriving and then moved to San Francisco. In 1910 she returned to New York, and, like her sister, succumbed to TB.

So find your family's heirloom photographs. Scan, restore, and share digital copies. They have stories to tell and places to take you.