The Long Awaited Meeting of Our Ulster-Scot Cousins!

Thursday afternoon, May 23, 2013, we arrived at the Europa Hotel,
in Belfast, County Antrim, Northern Ireland.

We arrived in Belfast at 3:45 PM. Since there were things that we had planned to do that evening, we had an early dinner. While 'Nida and I went to the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) to do research, John, our driver, took Bob, Eric, Michael and Nancy to the Titanic Museum.

The first night at the Europa Hotel in Belfast, we found out that our prepaid Irish cell phones did not work in Northern Ireland, only in the Republic of Ireland where we purchased them. However, it worked out alright because we were able to use the hotel phones to call each other and to make local calls to contact cousin Margaret. I called her, and we made arrangements to meet Saturday morning, May 25; so, it would be one more day before we would meet the cousins.

After breakfast on Friday morning, May 24, we toured the northeastern coastal area of County Antrim. We visited Bushmills Brewery, Dunluce Castle, Giant's Causeway and Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge.

We had taken the inland route north and on our return to Belfast, the coastal route. The beautiful scenic views were enjoyed by all. On our return from the north, as we were getting closer to Belfast, we drove through the little village of Ballynure where some of our cousins live. As we entered the village, along the side of the road there was a little planter box filled with pretty spring flowers, with the words printed on it “Welcome to Ballynure”. I felt like the welcome sign was especially for us! I wish I could have taken a picture of it, but we were in traffic and there was no place to pull over.

We returned to our Belfast hotel, the Europa, after a wonderful day of sight seeing. It was such an enjoyable day, but our anticipation of meeting our cousins was building!

On Saturday, May 25, the time had finally arrived for us to meet our cousins! As usual, we started our day with a good Irish breakfast at the hotel. About 10:30 AM we met Margaret Agnew at the Joymount Presbyterian Church in Carrickfergus.

This is the church where our great-great grandparents David and Jane “Jenny” (Erskine) Agnew were married in 1854, and where several of their infant children were baptized.

I rode with Margaret while the rest of the family followed in the coach.

First stop was at cousin Sam Agnew's home/farm. He was at a sheep competition event, so we didn't meet him until the next day at church. Sam has won many ribbons and trophies for his prized sheep.

His sisters, Martha and Willa were there to welcome and greet us. Sam had given permission for us to walk the farm and take pictures.

We walked through the sheep fields on our way to find the old "standing stone" that has marked the Agnew property since the early 1800's. The sheep were so frightened as all of us went trooping across their field, but in an orderly fashion, they all went into an adjoining one. Poor sheep, we invaded their territory! We had no trouble finding the standing stone with Martha's help; she knew right where it was.

Sam and his sisters had grown up on this farm. It was so much fun talking and getting acquainted with two of his five sisters, Martha and Willa, as well as cousin Margaret. As lunchtime approached we headed to the Raloo Presbyterian Church. Willa and I road with Margaret, and the rest of the family followed in the coach. Margaret had booked lunch for all of us, including John, our driver. It was served in the Church Hall Extension across the road from the church. The tables were decorated so beautifully with real china dishes and floral arrangements. Irish stew (broth) and soda and brown breads were served with juice. For dessert they served tray-bakes (pastries) and hot tea. We had such a wonderful time getting acquainted with some of our cousins.

After lunch, we visited the New Raloo Presbyterian Church Cemetery located right next to the church. That's what it is called even though it was opened in 1911. Many of our Agnew ancestors are buried there. Then, we said farewell until the next morning when we would meet

again for the Sunday morning church service on the final day of their 175th anniversary celebration.

While the rest of the family headed for Gleno Falls, Carrickfergus Castle and the Templecorran Presbyterian Church Ruins in Ballycarry, Margaret drove me around the area. First, we went to Gleno Village, and parked in Margaret's friend, John McMurtry's yard. He greeted us and asked Margaret if she would like to have some fresh rhubarb from his garden. She did, and he picked a generous amount for her. After that we walked a short distance to Gleno Waterfalls. It's a beautiful sight! Then, we drove to the Old Ballynure Cemetery where our great-great Grandparents, David and Jane "Jenny" (Erskine) Agnew, are buried. After all these years, the gravestone can no longer be identified, but I took several photos of the cemetery and some gravestones in the older section. Some of the Clements family, Mark Twain's ancestors, are buried here.

On our way to Margaret's house in Carrickfergus, she drove through some country roads. She showed me the old overgrown lane that goes to the house where she lived when she was a girl. Our great-great Granny Jane "Jenny" (Erskine) Agnew lived in this house at the time of her death in 1900. The road is no longer passable. But, earlier in the day, when we were at cousin Sam's, my grandson Eric, jumped the fence and went to the old derelict house to take pictures of it. Sam had warned us that there was a bull in that field, but Eric went anyway for a "look-see" and to get pictures for us.

Margaret and I stopped at Jackson's, a butchers and bakery rural market. (Now I'm wondering if it is called "Jackson's" because it is near the place where they say President Andrew Jackson's parents were born.) All the fresh meat there, was locally grown and processed. After we left, we stopped several times along the way to take photos. It was a sunny, clear day, and as we got closer to her house we could see Scotland from afar, and Carrickfergus Bay, now known as Belfast Lough. What a beautiful place County Antrim is! Carrickfergus, called "Carrick" by locals, is a large town located on the north shore of Belfast Lough, 11 miles (18 km) northeast of Belfast. It is County Antrim's oldest town and one of the oldest settlements in Northern Ireland. It became an inhabited town shortly after 1170 AD. Carrickfergus Castle was built a few years later.

When we arrived at Margaret's house, her mother, Jean, greeted us. She had been home all day cooking broth and preparing supper for us. She served tea and tray-bakes in the afternoon while Margaret and I were looking through old photos, letters, documents, and other paperwork that she wanted to share with me. Later, we had a delicious dinner together. The "broth" was an Irish soup with vegetables, barley and potatoes. Rhubarb tart with a scoop of ice cream and a dollop of whipped cream was served for dessert. It was delicious! After dinner, we continued to visit and look through the old photos and paperwork. At one point in time Margaret told me that I should have brought my over-night bag so that we could have more time to talk and share together. We ran out of time way too soon!

At 9:00 pm, our driver, John, came to pick me up to take me back to the hotel. It was so difficult to tell Margaret and her mother, Jean, goodbye after such a short visit. Margaret was so thoughtful and had packed several bags of food, (including delicious Irish chocolate bars), books, pictures, souvenirs, etc. for me to share with our family. Driver John and I had a great visit on the drive back to Belfast.

After breakfast Sunday morning, our driver, John, picked us up at the hotel. He drove us to the Raloo Presbyterian Church, Raloo, Larne, County Antrim, where we attended the 11:30 AM church service, and we sat with our Agnew cousins in the currently used Agnew pew/bench. Actually, there were so many of us cousins that we filled the pew in front of it as well. I heard someone say that the old Agnew pew was upstairs in the balcony. It was truly amazing that we were able to be there for the church's 175th

anniversary celebration! Pastor's sermon title was, “Thanksgiving for Creation, Each Other, and God Himself”. Originally, we had planned to go to Belfast at the beginning of our trip; then, we decided to reverse it, go to Dublin first and spend the last 4 days in Belfast to meet and visit with our cousins. At that time, we did not know about the anniversary celebration, and after we found out, we were so happy that we had changed our travel plans and were able to be there for this wonderful celebration!

We celebrated too, because our great-great granny Jane Agnew (Barker) had joined this church and taken her first communion here in 1867, 146 years ago in 2013. In 1870 she immigrated to the United States … settled, married and raised her family in Van Buren County, Iowa, USA.

Our Agnew cousins had planned and prepared a lovely luncheon for us at the Church Hall Extension across the street from the church. Tables were set up in a private room just for us. The tables were decorated so beautifully. Lunch consisted of a variety of finger sandwiches, tray-bakes and tea.

Willa (Agnew) Shuttleworth, Tom Banford, Maimie (Agnew) & Bill Hanna, & Sammy Peoples

There were 15 cousins plus our driver, John, seated at the table. Our cousins invited and included him in everything. After lunch we gathered in the Church Hall Extension for a group photo. More cousins joined us for the photo. Our driver, John, graciously took the pictures for us. There were 3 more cousins who were busy in the kitchen, Valerie Hanna and her daughters, doing food prep and serving guests, and Jacob Hanna was in charge of the parking, etc. There were at least 20 cousins there, maybe more.

L-R: Nance (Agnew) Wallace (standing), Hestor Peoples, Margaret (Boyd) Banford, Sam Agnew, Margie, Eric & Michael Allison, Martha (Agnew) Rankin, Bob Allison, John (our driver), Willa (Agnew) Shuttleworth, Tom Banford, Maimie (Agnew) & husband, Bill Hanna (Anita took photos)

L-R: Hestor, Margaret, Sam, Margie, Eric & Michael, Martha, Bob, John (our driver), Willa, Tom & Maimie

[From the Saturday Luncheon, clockwise from lower left] Michael, Eric, Anita, (Kinnaman) & Bob Allison, our driver John, Margaret Agnew, Margie Kinnaman, Willa (Agnew) Shuttleworth, Maime (Agnew) Hanna, and Nance (Agnew) Wallace

Front (L-R): Janette Campbell, Sam Agnew, Maimie (Agnew) Hanna, Margaret Banford, Muriel Agnew, Nance (Agnew) Wallace, Margie Kinnaman, Martha (Agnew) Rankin & Robert Allison
Back (L-R): William Hanna, Hessie (Agnew) Wilson, Willa (Agnew) Shuttleworth, Tom Banford, Anita (Kinnaman) Allison, Eric & Michael Allison, May 2013, at Raloo Presbyterian Church Extension Hall

About 3:30 PM, we hugged and bade farewell to our cousins. Then, we headed back to Belfast to take the Belfast Black Taxi Tour of the Murals and Troubles. The taxi driver picked us up at the hotel. The murals were works of art, but they depicted such sad and difficult times in their history. After the taxi tour, the driver took us back to the hotel where we packed our suitcases to get ready to leave for Dublin the next morning for our return flight home to the USA.

We left with mixed feelings … such happiness that we were finally able to meet so many of our Agnew cousins, but with a heavy heart that we could not stay a little longer … not knowing when we would meet again because of the great distance between our countries. However, who knows … maybe there is another trip to Northern Ireland in our future!

By Marjorie "Margie" Eva (Hockaday) Kinnaman

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