



Northern Ireland is a place of contrasts — from the countryside bed and breakfast farms (left) to the streets of downtown Belfast (right).

O'Neills prepare for gathering of the clan

IF YOUR NAME is O'Neill, or you are descended from an O'Neill, you are invited to the first International Gathering of the Clan O'Neill June 20 to July 4 in Northern Ireland.

If you have one of the hundreds of other Irish names common in America, you may still be interested in the work of Kathleen Neill (sic), founder and executive director of the year-old Irish Genealogical Association and organizer of the O'Neill gathering.

The U.S. Census Bureau, in a survey published this week, showed that more Americans trace their ancestry to Ireland than to any other country except Germany. Many of them have already been in touch with Neill, although they usually don't have the information they need to trace their ancestors.

According to her, the history of the O'Neill clan is the history of Ireland. Legend says that all Irish and Scottish Celts are descended from Milesius, King of Spain, who conquered Ireland in 500 B.C., and that his son Heremon is the ancestor of the O'Neills.

THE O'NEILLS introduced the clan system, keeping accurate genealogical records, and are thus the oldest traceable family in Europe. It was an O'Neill, then spelled Niall, who kidnapped the young boy who later became St. Patrick.

It was the same family that began the custom of prefixing a name with O



Iris Jones
contributing travel editor

("descended from"); both O'Neill and MacNeill mean "son of Neill," although many families eventually dropped the O and the Mac, especially in America.

There are now 29,000 O'Neills in Ireland, and thousands more around the world. If you are one of them, you can enjoy lectures, pageants, receptions, sightseeing tours and attend the inauguration of the Clan Chieftain, the Right Honorable Lord O'Neill who was found living in Spain.

Any O'Neill can attend, but some events are open only to those who book through the Irish Genealogical Association, which offers the program and accommodations for \$500 to \$1,000 for one week, \$1,300 to \$1,600 for two weeks, depending on whether you stay in university halls or first class hotels.

You can also do a self-drive bed-and-breakfast trip for \$25. Because of changing currency exchange rates, you may save considerably by paying the rates charged in pound sterling. These prices do not include air fare to Ireland.

one-of-a-kind traveler

IF YOU ARE more interested in tracing your ancestors than celebrating the O'Neills, the Irish Genealogical Association has some suggestions for you. Do as much homework as possible at home. Many people arrive in Ireland expecting to find the information they need at that end, but they are often disappointed.

Ask relatives for information. Check family gravestones. Check immigration lists in the United States and state archives in Nova Scotia, Canada. Many families are recorded in the extensive genealogical files kept by the Church of the Latter Day Saints in Salt Lake City, even though such families are not Mormons.

Ideally, you should have your ancestor's name, parish, county, the name of the ship he sailed on and the date of his birth. Most people don't have that much information.

"It's like a detective story or a jigsaw puzzle," Kathleen Neill says. "Collect every tiny bit of information at home, especially the location where your ancestor lived in Ireland."

Many people think that their families came from Londonderry, or Derry as it is often called in Ireland; but that may only be the city from which their ship sailed to America.

IF YOU ARE concerned about traveling in Northern Ireland, you may be surprised at how little The Troubles, as the Irish call it, affects your trip.

Certain security precautions are very visible: on shuttle planes to Belfast, in the blocked-off center city areas, where only foot passengers are allowed; in the occasional roadblock. Most of Northern Ireland, however,

is a peaceful green pastoral land, especially attractive to travelers who enjoy driving through the countryside and staying in bed-and-breakfast accommodations.

For travel information, contact the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, c/o

the British Tourist Authority, 680 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10019. Contact Kathleen Neill at the Irish Genealogical Association, 162a Kingsway, Dunmurry, Belfast, BT179AD, Northern Ireland. Membership in the association is available.



Kathleen Neill is organizer of this summer's Gathering of the clan O'Neill.

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