

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

### IRELAND



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THE IRISH ANCESTRY  
OF  
PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN



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 6 February 1911 at Tampico, Whiteside Co., Illinois (120 miles west of Chicago). Elder brother J. Neil Reagan (see Washington Post, 4 August 1980, Page B1, about him), 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 8 November 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 salesman, living 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. Of her, more anon.

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- (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 \$1120. 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 Reagan (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

- (6) 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 31 October 1852 at St. George's Catholic Cathedral in Southwark, south London. Both gave

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

- (7) The English census of 30 March 1851 listed both Michael Reagan and Catherine Mulcahy, as aged 21 and 28 respectively, and both born in County 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 County 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 Record Office, Dublin, lists of householders (for tax purposes) of the period 1825-30. Searching this for the entire county of Tipperary, this produced a list of places where

- (a) 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 fifteen Catholic parish registers to be searched, being parishes where Reagans/Regans/O'Regans were then living; also, for certainty, adjoining parishes were searched as well, making a total of twenty-seven 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 twenty-nine 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 into 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 (the next paragraph explains surnames and topography):

5 July	1819	Elena	
24 June	1821	John	
29 Oct.	1823	Margaret	
13 Sept.	1826	Elizabeth	
***	3 Sept.	1829	MICHAEL

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

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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 <sup>generally</sup> unknown in <sup>modern</sup> 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 signed his name in London in 1852.

'Townlands' are the smallest Irish territorial unit, in essence a parish is comparable to an American township; there are twenty-nine Catholic parishes in County Tipperary. Several townlands make up one parish. Doolis is a townland of some 229 acres.

(12) A visit to Doolis came next. This lies at the far end of the parish some two miles west of Ballyporeen village, and up a muddy track. There are no inhabited houses actually within the townland boundaries, only three former houses, <sup>sites,</sup> now used as haysheds.

Maps of Doolis show twelve houses there in 1841, and four in 1901. This reflects the massive depopulation in Ireland following the great Famine of 1845-49, dates which coincide with when Michael O'Regan/Reagan and his brothers left Ireland and so the reason is not hard to guess.

Now living nearby, sixty-eight year old farmer Paddy Russell has lived there all his life, he now owns and farms the land of Doolis. He can remember no Regans/O'Regans etc. on

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Doolis at all, although there was a family of O'Regan nearby at Coolprevane, the adjoining townland, extinct on the death of four elderly sisters some ten to fifteen years ago. Traditional memory survives of the houses on Doolis which have disappeared.

The Catholic church in Ballyporeen village was built in 1824, and is where Michael O'Regan/Reagan was baptised. There is also the older ruined church at Templetenny. There is an O'Regan family gravestone at Ballyporeen. *of the Coolprevane family.*

(13) Additional material includes:

- (a) A cutting from the Cork Examiner, including historical background on Doolis.
- (b) A tape interview with Paddy Russell (very heavy accent)
- (c) Photographs - not good, due to a poor camera and dreadful weather. Photographs include the ruined houses on Doolis, Paddy Russell, the Catholic church in Ballyporeen, the O'Regan grave, the ruined church and churchyard at Templetenny, general views of Ballyporeen village etc.
- (d) Maps showing the location.

(D) EARLIER ANCESTORS

- (14) According to the great Irish genealogist, Dr. Edward MacLysaght, the O'Regans of County Limerick (Doolis lies within a mile or two of that county boundary) descend from Riagan (pronounced 'Reegan'), nephew of the great Irish King, Brian Boru. (Dr. MacLysaght was formerly chairman of the Irish Manuscripts Commission and Chief Herald of Ireland.)

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Brian Boru was one of the greatest kings in Irish history, and he died in 1014 at the Battle of Clontarf which freed Ireland from Danish domination.

According to O'Hart (Irish Landed Gentry) and others, Riagan was son of Donchuan, brother of King Brian Boru (or Boroimhe/Borumha), and eleventh in descent from Eochaid who had been baptised a christian by St. Patrick and descended from Olioll Olum, king of Munster, by his wife Sabina, daughter of Conn of the Hundred Battles, although it has to be said that there are debatable points in these early Irish pedigrees. There is nonetheless sound reasoning to suppose that the O'Regans descend from the heroes of ancient Ireland and these early Irish pedigrees are credited by scholars as being the oldest documented genealogies in Western Europe.

(E) OTHER IRISH-AMERICAN PRESIDENTS

Ronald Reagan is ninth on the list, but only the second of Catholic Irish origins.

	<u>Original Religion</u>	
Andrew Jackson	Protestant	Antrim
James Polk	Protestant	Derry
James Buchanan	Protestant	Donegal
Chester Arthur	Protestant	Antrim
William McKinley	Protestant	?
John Kennedy	Catholic	Wexford
Richard Nixon	Quaker	Kildare
Gerald Ford (born King)	Protestant	Monaghan
Ronald Reagan	Catholic	Tipperary

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(F) FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

- (a) Presentation of a parchment pedigree.
  - (b) Grant of Irish Coat of Arms.
  - (c) Research into Ronald Reagan's mother's ancestry,  
(she was half-Scottish, half-English).
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## SUMMARY

Ronald Reagan is a very new American.

His father was born in Illinois.

His paternal grandfather was born in England of Irish parents.

His paternal grandmother was born in Illinois of Irish parents.

His mother was born in Illinois.

His maternal grandfather was born in Scotland.

His maternal grandmother was born in England.

i.e. he is half Irish, one quarter Scots, one quarter English.

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His paternal ancestry is:

Great-great-grandfather: THOMAS O'REGAN, poor landless labourer of Doolis, Ballyporeen, County Tipperary, Ireland, born before 1800, married to Margaret Murphy before 1817, dead by 1852.

Great-grandfather: MICHAEL O'REGAN or REAGAN, born in Doolis, baptised in Ballyporeen Catholic church on 3 Sept. 1829. Moved to London at the time of the great Famine, 1845-49. Married in London on 31 Oct. 1852 to Catherine Mulcahy in a Catholic church. Emigrated to Illinois 1858, and was a farmer there, could read and write. Employed his elder brothers as labourers.

Grandfather: JOHN REAGAN, born in Peckham, south London, 29 May 1854. Baptised in a Catholic church. Emigrated to Illinois with his parents in 1858. Married Jennie Cusick in Fulton, Illinois, 1878. Died 1889.

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SUMMARY (...../Continued)

Father:

JOHN REAGAN, born in Fulton, Illinois, July 1883. Brought up by his aunt Margaret (Reagan) Baldwin, wife of Orson G. Baldwin, dry goods merchant in Bennett, Iowa. Married 8 Nov. 1904 in Fulton, Illinois, Catholic church, to Jennie Wilson, half-Scottish, half-English Protestant. RONALD REAGAN born Tampico, Illinois on 6 Feb. 1911.

FURTHER ENQUIRIES

Debrett's Peerage Ltd.  
Debrett Ancestry Research  
Telephone: 0962-69067

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