



About the Towey Clan

How We Got Started

How Long Has The Towey Clan been Formalized?

The Towey Clan was formally registered by authority of the Clans of Ireland during the year 2000, and the Toweys attending the first clan meeting accepted this status on Easter Sunday, 15 April 2001 at the Foxhunter, Lucan, Co. Dublin, Ireland.

Who Organized The Towey Clan?



MIKE TOWEY 2007

Many Toweys in Ireland and America were consulted, but the tasks of securing recognition for the Towey Clan and setting up our four reunion gatherings depended especially on the vigorous and unflinching efforts of Mike (Haully) Towey, a native of Attiantaggart Townland in Kilcolman Parish and presently residing in Dublin.

Mike Towey of Dublin was elected as Clan Taoiseach at the 2001 Rally and re-voted to that office at the mid-August Rallies in 2004 and 2007 as well as in May 2010. His Deputy or Tánaiste is Mary Towey Ratto of California, whose great great grandfather Paddy Towey was the last operator of the Towey mill in Derrynabrock. Both of these positions are honorary; however, Mike continues to be busy in preserving and promoting the existence of the Towey Clan organization.

TITLE	GAELIC EQUIVALENT	HONORARY OFFICERS
Chief	Taoiseach	Mike Towey, Dublin, Ireland
Deputy	Tánaiste	Mary Towey Ratto, Ukiah, California

Mike's family is part of the "Miller Toweys" of Derrynabrock, so designated in view of their traditional occupation as operators of the mill in that townland after their arrival centuries ago from Co. Cork. With Mike's initial prompting, and aided by contacts through the Internet and more conventional means, an informal network of Toweys grew during the first year of the new millennium.

Over 60 people bearing our surname were in attendance at our first reunion on April 14 and 15, 2001, with about half of them coming from America. More would probably have participated except for the unfortunate outbreak of foot and mouth disease in England as the year 2001 began, which caused the Irish government to impose rural travel restrictions to limit (quite successfully) the spread of that scourge within Ireland. Subsequently, there were even larger gatherings in Ballaghaderreen in August 2004, August 2007 and May 2010. We look forward to the next gathering in Minnesota in 2012 and then in Ballaghaderreen in 2014.

Who are the Officers of the Towey Clan?

These are the Clan's Executive Officers who were elected on May 16, 2010 at the gathering in Ballaghaderreen.

TITLE	GAELIC EQUIVALENT	EXECUTIVE OFFICERS
Chairperson	Cathaoirleach	Edward Towey, Deephaven, Minnesota
Assistant Chairperson	Iar Cathaoirleach	Daniel Towey, Blaine, Minnesota
Secretary	Runai	Janet Towey Mann, Southbury, Connecticut
Assistant Secretary	Iar Runai	Caroline Hassett Power, Quin, Co. Clare, Ireland
Treasurer	Cisteoir	Patrick Hassett, Shannon, Co. Clare, Ireland
Assistant Treasurer	Cisteoir Cunta	Patrick Burns, Gig Harbor, Washington
Genealogist and Historian	Seanchai & Stairtheoir	Position Open
Assistant Genealogist	Seanchai Cunta	Richard Towey, Corvallis, Oregon.
Webmaster		William Towey, Stockton, California
Assistant Webmaster		Mike Towey, Dublin, Ireland

Committee Members	Eileen Collins, Birmingham, UK Michael Towey, Liverpool, UK Timothy Towey, Newport, Rhode Island
-------------------	--

Both Dan Towey and Pat Burns trace their origins to Bockagh Townland in Kilcolman Parish on their great grandmother's side, and on their great grandfather's side to either Co. Cork or Co. Mayo. Family legend says Cork, but the tombstones for his great grandfather's two sisters who are buried near him in Simpson, Minnesota say they came from Ballaghaderreen. Janet Towey Mann and her brothers Richard Towey and William Towey trace their origins to Broher and to Barnaboy from where their grandfather Pat emigrated in 1885. Helen Towey is Mary Ratto's sister, so she too is a Miller Towey. Malachy Towey is a "Sailor Towey" (his great grandmother was Celia Hunt) he was born in Derrynabrock.

**TOWEY BANNER DISPLAYED AT DURKIN'S PUB
IN AUGUST 2007 AND MAY 2010 REUNIONS**



Where is the "home area" of the Toweys?

People bearing the Irish surname of Towey trace their ancestry primarily to four parishes – Castlemore, Kilcolman, Kilbeagh and Kilmovee – in the vicinity of the town of Ballaghaderreen. These four parishes are roughly co-extensive with the ancient territory known as Sliabh Lughha. Historically all of these were part of Co. Mayo, with the exception of a small portion of Kilcolman parish which was put in Co. Sligo when county boundaries were specified by the English invaders in the year 1570. Thus Sliabh Lughha became the northern half of Costello Barony, at just about the time when predominant ownership of the land was passing from the Costellos to the Dillons. (The Sligo portion became part of the Coolavin half-barony). Following passage of the Irish Poor Law in the late 1830s, Castlemore, Kilcolman and five townlands of Kilbeagh became part of the Castlereagh (sometimes Castlereagh) Poor Law Union (PLU), and the rest of Kilbeagh and Kilmovee were assigned to the Swinford PLU. The Sligo townlands went into the Boyle PLU. There have been a few additional border shifts affecting individual townlands, and some Toweys have crossed into Tibohine parish to the east of Ballaghaderreen. Then in 1898 a border change for governmental convenience shifted Castlemore and Kilcolman (including Ballaghaderreen itself) from Co. Mayo to Co. Roscommon. Most of the older records of the Toweys may still be listed under Co. Mayo, while those which pertain to 1898 and thereafter are mainly found under Co. Roscommon. The GAA sports competition still accepts the old boundry which leaves Ballaghaderreen in Co. Mayo.

Does the Towey surname have an ancient origin?

Some recognized surname authorities assert that the Toweys are descendants of the 11th Century chieftain named O'Toghdha who lived in Moygawnagh Parish farther to the northwest in Co. Mayo. But there is no evidence that O'Toghdha's family survived over the succeeding centuries, and when the surname scholars – John O'Donovan during the Ordnance Survey of the 1830s, and later Rev. Patrick Woulfe and Edward MacLysaght - inquired into name origins, they evidently didn't ask any of our ancestors what their family legends were. We don't give much credence to O'Toghdha as our founder.

When our forefathers of the early 20th century began to compare family legends, O'Toghdha's name was seldom if ever mentioned. Rather, some - from Kilcolman and Kilbeagh parishes - recalled having been told that their ancestors were originally Touhys who had fled northward from the bloody fighting in Co. Cork between the English and the Irish during the late 16th and early 17th centuries. These Touhys from southern Munster are generally regarded historically as a sept of the Tuohy family in the border area between Cos. Clare and Galway. The ancient name in Gaelic was Ó Tuathaigh.

Other Toweys - especially in Castlemore and Kilmovee parishes - uphold the tradition that they are descendants of an O'Neill sept which had been transplanted from Co. Tyrone by Oliver Cromwell in the mid-17th century. Thus one of the early 20th century searchers into the family history, Father James Towey, CSP, of California (1882-1953), always insisted that the Toweys were the fighting branch of the O'Neills. Some locals say we were the minstrels to O'Neill, and there are many Towey musicians locally; maybe we are both minstrels and the fighting branch.

During the first 2 of the 3+ centuries of ascendancy by the English in Ireland, ancient bardic traditions were broken, and most Irish, by refusing to conform to the imposed Penal laws enacted in 1695 after the siege of Limerick in 1690-1691 and to the Protestant religion, were deprived of access to formal schooling, owning property and to most occupations other than tenant farming. Land ownership among Catholics (including some English) plummeted from an estimated 59% of total land available in 1641 to only about 5% in 1776. Furthermore, few records were kept about them, and even these were subject to destruction in troubled times.

How did the family surname become spelled as Towey?

In Ireland, if the surname is spelled as Towey, this virtually guarantees that the family's origin was in the Ballaghaderreen vicinity. But the Tuohy spelling is quite common in Kilmovee Parish, and in the mid-19th Century records, spelling rules were casual and not consistent from one recorded event to the next, e.g. marriages and baptisms. So the name might be spelled as Touhy, Tuohy, Tuoy or Towey while referring to the same families. The oldest published instance of the spelling as Towey is found in 1796 when the Belfast-based Irish Linen Board donated spinning wheels to Castlemore farmers (among others) as part of their policy of promoting linen production. Only since the late 19th century has Towey become the standardized spelling around Ballaghaderreen. There is also a written document in National Library which is a copy of a licence to Thomas Towey, Barnaboy to grow flax, dated 1796.

One can say that virtually all Irish surnames were anglicized at some time during the past four centuries. Touhy and Tuohy are anglicized names, but the later change to Towey around Ballaghaderreen may suggest that the local English establishment placed little importance on

Downloaded from www.toweyclan.com

their asserted Munster origins. Indeed, the English may have sought to distinguish local families from those living elsewhere.

Ballaghaderreen supporters of the O'Neill heritage speak of an early antagonism to their surname upon arrival in Connacht, so the alternate surname of Tully was initially adopted, and some say that it evolved into Thuffy or Tuffy, and then into Towey. Tully can perhaps be explained as a nickname for Tirlagh, for indeed the Cromwell government did transplant a Turlagh McArt Og O'Neill, grandson of Tirlagh Luineach O'Neill and grandson-in-law of the great Hugh O'Neill, to Kilmovee Parish in 1656. Tirlagh was assigned some land seized from the English owner, Viscount Dillon, who had supported (as did Tirlagh himself) the losing cause of King Charles I during the English Civil War. The subsequent progression through Tuffy remains unexplained, but a few families of that surname appear in the records of Sliabh Lugha parishes during the 19th century. Or Towey might have emerged from the Gaelic "aduaidh" signifying the O'Neills' journey "from the north". O'thuaidh also meant to the north. Later, during the 1790s, the Scottish troops stationed in Ballaghaderreen would have known of Towie Parish in Aberdeenshire (in Scots' Gaelic, Towie connotes "country" or place of residence). The Tywi River in Wales is anglicized as Towey too. There is no historical evidence confirming that the aristocratic O'Neills reached Kilmovee or remained there for any length of time. But their more humble retainers may have been forced into the journey and could have stayed as tenant farmers even after King Charles II restored the Irish lands to the Dillons in the 1660s. (Bad luck for the O'Neills, but whatever land that any of the ethnic Irish might have retained after the Cromwellian conquest was in any event largely forfeited to the English following the defeat of James II by William of Orange in 1690). This grand legend of the O'Neill presence in Mayo's northeast corner has just enough factual support to rescue it from the wholly fanciful but not nearly enough to resolve lingering challenges to its validity. We can only keep looking, with comfort from our yDNA tests which show membership in the gene pool of Nial of the Nine Hostages.

With the 19th century emigrations from Ireland, the Touhys from the Cork area and the Tuohys from around the Clare\Galway border, as well as the Toweys from the Mayo\Roscommon\Sligo border, sometimes adopted (or were assigned) variant spellings on reaching their foreign destinations. In America, England, Australia and elsewhere, such surnames as Tooh(e)y, Tuh(e)y and Twoh(e)y might have come from any of the 3 groups. Tuohy is by far the most numerous of the 3 original surnames, but in individual instances of variant spelling, one needs to inquire into family traditions and places of origin.

How is the Towey surname pronounced?

Nowadays the Towey surname is probably most often pronounced with the long "o" to rhyme with "how". Older cousins who grew up around Ballaghaderreen sometimes revert to pronouncing the name in this way but with a modified ending which becomes "Tow-ah". But the pronunciation is often rhymed with "who" or "two" and this is also widely accepted in view of the connection with Touhy\Tuohy. But anyone who chooses to say our surname as rhyming with "hoe" or "toe" is unfamiliar with us. When one examines 19th century ship passenger manifests and subsequent documents where variant spellings of Towey, Tuohy, Touhy, etc. emerge, it would appear that many of our own ancestors must have pronounced their surname to rhyme with "two".